



Northern Ireland
Assembly

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Hansard)
and
**JOURNAL OF
PROCEEDINGS**

Volume 117

(9 July 2016 to 23 September 2016)

Table of Contents

Assembly Members	v
Principal Officers and Officials of the Assembly	vi
Ministerial Offices	vii
Office of the Official Report (Hansard).....	viii

Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sittings

Monday 12 September 2016

Assembly Business	1
Executive Committee Business	
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill: Royal Assent	1
Budget (No. 2) Bill: Royal Assent	1
Assembly Business	
Resignation of Member: Mr Daithí McKay	2
New Assembly Member: Mr Philip McGuigan	2
Committee Procedures	2
Committee Membership.....	2
Assembly Business	3
Ministerial Statement	
North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes	3
Private Members' Business	
Stalking.....	9
Oral Answers to Questions	
Economy.....	18
Education	25
Private Members' Business	
Stalking (<i>continued</i>)	32
Housing Selection Scheme	34

Tuesday 13 September 2016

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary Meeting.....	47
British-Irish Council: 22 July 2016.....	50
Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters.....	54

Private Members' Business

Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport.....	57
--	----

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance.....	67
Health.....	73

Private Members' Business

Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport (<i>continued</i>).....	81
---	----

Adjournment

Investing in Town Centres in Upper Bann.....	85
--	----

Monday 19 September 2016

Assembly Business	91
Public Petition: Cancer Drugs.....	92

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: First Stage.....	92
--	----

Private Members' Business

'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU'.....	93
---	----

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office.....	106
Infrastructure.....	112

Private Members' Business

Used Tyres.....	119
-----------------	-----

Tuesday 20 September 2016

Assembly Business

Public Petition: End the Veto on Marriage Equality.....	131
---	-----

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways.....	131
North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body.....	133

Private Members' Business

Japanese Knotweed.....	137
Road Maintenance Budget Deficit.....	145

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice.....	151
Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.....	157

Private Members' Business

Road Maintenance Budget Deficit (<i>continued</i>).....	164
---	-----

Adjournment

Health Service Provision: North Antrim.....	171
---	-----

Written Ministerial Statements

The Executive Office/Justice

Executive Strategy for Tackling Paramilitarism..... WMS 1

Infrastructure

A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme – Making of the Vesting Orders and proceeding with the scheme WMS 2

Written Answers

Friday 15 July 2016

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 1
Department for Communities	WA 9
Department of Education	WA 34
Department for the Economy.....	WA 35
Department of Finance	WA 37
Department of Health.....	WA 44
Department for Infrastructure.....	WA 55
Department of Justice	WA 60
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission.....	WA 60

Friday 22 July 2016

The Executive Office	WA 63
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 65
Department for Communities	WA 67
Department of Education	WA 68
Department of Finance	WA 68
Department of Health.....	WA 71
Department for Infrastructure.....	WA 79
Department of Justice	WA 99

Friday 29 July 2016

The Executive Office	WA 105
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 111
Department for Communities	WA 117
Department of Education	WA 142
Department for the Economy.....	WA 142
Department of Finance	WA 147
Department of Health.....	WA 147
Department for Infrastructure.....	WA 149

Friday 5 August 2016

The Executive Office	WA 151
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 154
Department for Communities	WA 157
Department for the Economy.....	WA 158
Department of Health.....	WA 167
Department for Infrastructure.....	WA 168

Friday 2 September 2016

The Executive Office	WA 169
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 173
Department for the Economy	WA 175
Department of Finance	WA 185
Department of Health	WA 185
Department for Infrastructure	WA 186

Friday 23 September 2016

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	WA 189
Department for Communities	WA 196
Department of Education	WA 213
Department for the Economy	WA 260
Department of Finance	WA 268
Department of Health	WA 276
Department for Infrastructure	WA 294
Department of Justice	WA 330
Northern Ireland Assembly Commission	WA 343

Revised Written Answers

Friday 29 July 2016

Department for Communities	RWA 1
----------------------------------	-------

Friday 2 September 2016

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs	RWA 2
--	-------

Friday 23 September 2016

Department of Finance	RWA 3
-----------------------------	-------

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Monday 12 September 2016	MOP 1
Tuesday 13 September 2016	MOP 11
Monday 19 September 2016	MOP 15
Tuesday 20 September 2016	MOP 21

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Bradley, Mrs Sinead (South Down)
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McCrossan, Daniel (West Tyrone)
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McIlveen, Miss Michelle (Strangford)
McKay, Mr Daithí (North Antrim) (*until 18 August 2016*)
McKee, Harold (South Down)
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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Settings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Members, before we proceed with today's business, I welcome each and every one of you back after recess.

Executive Committee Business

**Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers)
Bill: Royal Assent**

Budget (No. 2) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: Two Bills have received Royal Assent since the last sitting. The Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 became law on 22 July 2016. The Budget (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 became law on 29 July 2016.

Assembly Business

Resignation of Member: Mr Daithí McKay

Mr Speaker: I received a letter from Mr Daithí McKay, giving me notice of his intention to resign as a Member for the North Antrim constituency with effect from 18 August 2016. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

New Assembly Member: Mr Philip McGuigan

Mr Speaker: I have been informed by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Philip McGuigan has been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the North Antrim constituency to fill the vacancy resulting from Mr McKay's resignation. Mr McGuigan signed the undertaking and Roll of Membership and entered his designation in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk/Chief Executive on 30 August 2016. The Member has now taken his seat. I welcome him to the House and wish him success.

Committee Procedures

Mr Speaker: Members will be aware that I wrote to all Members on 22 August. In that letter, I informed all Members that I had asked officials to review Committee procedures to assess whether any changes were required in light of the developments over the summer surrounding the former Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel in the last mandate. I wrote to all Member again this morning with an initial update on that work.

There do not appear to be any significant differences between our Committee procedures and those in other legislatures. However, it is still prudent, given the circumstances, to consider whether any of our existing arrangements need to be clarified, made more specific or strengthened. Therefore, my officials and I will engage with Committee Chairpersons in the coming weeks to consider some issues further. I do not intend to dwell on the detail of that letter here and now, but I want to underline one general principle at the start of the session. I know that Members are keen to pursue issues because they feel passionately about them, because of media reporting or because there is a party political agenda involved. In that context, Members sometimes find our procedures slow and frustrating. However, our procedures are designed to ensure that our business is conducted on a fair, sound and legal basis. The interests of reaching solid conclusions and defending the reputation of our proceedings are not served if questions can be legitimately raised about the processes followed or if the substance of the issue has not been the key driving factor.

As Speaker, I understand that I have a role and responsibility to give greater consideration than other Members to procedural issues. However, I hope that we can all agree at the start of this new Assembly session that it is for every single one of us to defend and uphold the value and importance that our Committees bring to this situation. Let us move on.

Committee Membership

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

Resolved:

That Mr Ian Milne be appointed as a member of the Committee for Health; that Mr Philip McGuigan replace Mr Ian Milne as a member of the Committee for the Executive Office; and that Mr Philip McGuigan be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee. — [Ms Ní Chuilín.]

Assembly Business

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Am I to understand that, despite the most astounding revelations last week on BBC 'Spotlight', the Assembly will today bury its head in the sand and proceed as if none of those revelations was made? Is that really so? Are we not even to have the opportunity by question, Matter of the Day or anything else to debate those shocking issues?

Mr Speaker: The Member knows that there are considerations that I take into account when Matters of the Day are raised. He also knows that there are procedural matters and a mechanism by which issues can be raised. I say to all Members that I have taken my decision clearly in line with Speaker's rulings and conventions on the type of issue that is accepted as a Matter of the Day.

Ministerial Statement

North/South Ministerial Council: Special EU Programmes

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Deas a bheith ar ais. It is nice to be back at school, Mr Speaker, and I look forward to your Christmas report card. Before I start my formal statement, I put on record our thanks to Frank Duffy, who heads our European unit at the Department, and Gina McIntyre, who heads up the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB). They have been doing Trojan work to try to speed up the process of dealing with all the European bids.

Faoi réir alt 52 de Acht Thuaisceart Éireann 1998, is mian liom an ráiteas seo a leanas a thabhairt ar an naoú cruinniú déag de chuid na Comhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas i bhformáid eárnála an Aontais Eorpaigh, a reachtáladh i mBaile Átha Cliath in oifigí na Roinne Gnóthaí Eachtracha agus Trádála dé hAoine 7 Iúil 2016.

Mar Aire Airgeadais, is mise a rinne ionadaíocht don Choiste Feidhmiúcháin, agus bhí an tAire sóisearach Ross in éineacht liom. Ba é Paschal Donohoe TD, an tAire Caitechais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe, a rinne ionadaíocht do Rialtas na hÉireann.

In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the nineteenth meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in special EU programmes sectoral format, which was held in Dublin in the offices of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade on Friday 7 July 2016. As Minister of Finance, I represented the Executive and was accompanied by junior Minister Ross. The Irish Government were represented by Paschal Donohoe TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

We had a broad discussion on the implications of the EU referendum and reiterated the joint commitment of the Executive and Irish Government to work together to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that the benefits of North/South cooperation are fully recognised in any new arrangements that emerge as regards the future relationship with the European Union. We also reiterated the recent NSMC plenary commitment to the successful implementation of the Peace and INTERREG programmes and agreed to consider the issue of securing the European regional development fund (ERDF) funding for Peace and INTERREG, including through engagement with the European Commission.

The Council noted that the two sponsor Departments are currently considering proposals relating to the governance structures and reporting arrangements in place for the Special EU Programmes Body and will report back at a future meeting. An excellent presentation was provided by the INTERREG IVa higher attainment through cross-border hubs (HATCH) project. This initiative received €1 million in funding and was designed to support SMEs in the construction and engineering sectors, to maximise the economic contribution of the migrant workforce and to encourage female entrepreneurs.

As this was the first meeting in SEUPB sectoral format for all Ministers attending, the chief executive of the Special EU Programmes Body, Gina McIntyre, provided a high-level overview of its work and its forward

plans. She updated the Council on progress since the previous special EU programmes sectoral meeting, in December of last year. Following the result of the EU referendum, the SEUPB noted that it would work closely with my Department and with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to address the issues arising, particularly its impact on EU programme implementation and spend.

The chief executive reported that all INTERREG Va programme themes for 2014-2020 have opened for calls: research and innovation, environment, sustainable transport and health. Eight stage-1 steering committee meetings had been held, progressing 38 projects to stage 2. Four elements of the 2014-2020 Peace IV programme — shared education, building positive relations through regional projects, local authority action plans and the victims and survivors element of shared spaces and services — had opened for project applications. Two stage-1 meetings had been held, advancing five projects to stage 2.

The PEACE III programme, for 2007-2013, had provided funding to 215 projects with a commitment level of 99%. The INTERREG IVa programme for the same period funded 88 projects, committing 101.5% of its allocation. Closure is now being undertaken for both the Peace III and INTERREG IVa programmes by the SEUPB.

The Council was advised that the North was also successful in securing an additional £8.9m through 53 projects from INTERREG IVa transnational and interregional competitive funding programmes in the 2007-2013 funding period. For the 2014-2020 programmes, 18 projects have been approved to date, with a value of €4m. Remaining project calls and assessment will continue for the programmes during 2016 and 2017. The Council noted that both the draft 2017 SEUPB business plan and the 2017-19 corporate plan are currently being prepared by the SEUPB with a view to obtaining sponsor Department and NSMC approval by the end of this year. The annual accounts for 2015 received an unqualified audit opinion from the Comptrollers and Auditors General and will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas in due course. In closing, the Council approved the appointment of Barra Ó Muirí — fear uasal — to the board of Foras na Gaeilge, the North/South language body, with effect from 7 July 2016 until 12 December 2016. The Council agreed to hold its next special EU programmes meeting in autumn 2016.

12.15 pm

Mr Smith: I am a bit surprised to see the Minister still in situ but as he has decided to continue in post I thank him for his statement. The Minister, in his statement, has failed to recognise that the Executive look set to lose possibly millions of pounds of European funding. Today's statement basically reads as business as usual. Will the Minister give a commitment that each of the 11 councils here will be in a position to avail of and draw down the €80 million funding allocated to the local authority actions plans?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member, and I know he will get used to seeing me in this position for a long time. I hope he keeps his position as well. Despite the noise offstage, the Executive have been tremendously focused, as have our partners in Scotland and Wales, on ensuring that every cent, every penny that our people are due from Europe under the many programmes come to us. Of course my

responsibility is for Peace and INTERREG, but I know that I speak for my fellow Ministers in Agriculture, Economy, and Infrastructure. The money is essential, not only for underpinning peace but for building a prosperous and inclusive future.

I will also say, in praise of the INTERREG steering panels, that they have done tremendous work and shown great leadership. They got a head start on the Peace programme but just last week, on 7 and 8 September, they met and were able to allocate €124 million of funding to vital cross-border projects including transnational programmes and some absolutely key projects in our universities.

To the councils and other bodies that are applying for Peace funding in particular, it is time to double down and match the enthusiasm and energy that I have seen in my Department and among top civil servants in trying to maximise, protect and safeguard EU funding. It is time to double down and for everyone else to step up to the plate. I will be meeting the councils shortly. I say to them that the applications to date have not been fully satisfactory. I want to see the councils as full partners and that they realise all of the funding that we would like them to receive under these programmes.

Mrs Little Pengelly (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance): I thank the Minister for his statement this morning and I welcome, in particular, the clarification and commitment given by Her Majesty's Treasury to underwrite and guarantee signed-off EU expenditure by the autumn statement. I also welcome the Minister's comments around the commitment to maximise expenditure. It is worth remembering that this is indeed money that is paid into the European Union by the UK and we want to maximise that expenditure. Will the Minister give a commitment that he will continue to maximise that expenditure by ensuring as much sign-off as possible by the autumn statement and that, in that context, he will continue to liaise with Her Majesty's Treasury to see what further flexibility there may be in and around the underwriting and guarantees?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am not going to rise to the political debate on this occasion; there will be another time for that. The point that the Member makes is important. Many groups who apply for Peace or INTERREG funding — Peace funding in particular — paused, hesitated, held back and thought that, perhaps, they should not apply, that perhaps their applications would fall, or, for example, that money would be guaranteed only up until end of 2019. Departments and I have been urging people to make sure that not only are applications put in but they are put in today and more speedily than was the case before.

In relation to Mr Hammond's commitment, I think he did not go far enough. I met Mr David Davis, the self-styled or so-called Minister for Brexit, and there is still a huge uncertainty coming out of Westminster on how they will deal with EU funding. I welcome the fact that any letters of offer issued before 23 November will be honoured, but Mr Hammond did not go far enough because that still leaves £300 million at risk in Peace and INTERREG. Regarding ERDF funding, he has not guaranteed that moneys not allocated by the autumn statement will be delivered. That puts around €300 million in this case at risk as well.

The universities did very well. My message to Mr Hammond — we will be meeting soon on this issue — which is echoed by our colleagues in Cardiff and

Edinburgh, is that we should get the same deal as he gave universities on research. He said that a letter of offer issued at any point up until Brexit, if it happens, will be honoured. If he gives us that guarantee for all the funding that we seek, it will make a real difference in giving people certainty.

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Minister for his statement and his continuing lobbying on behalf of the community groups and community infrastructure that rely so heavily on European Peace funding. Will he outline the current position on the Peace IV children and young people theme?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomhalta, as an ráiteas sin. I want to put on record that some areas of Peace funding are of particular concern, one of which is the allocation for children and young people. It is absolutely essential that we get this right, because €50 million was allocated in this area.

In September 2014, the Executive gave approval to submit a draft Peace IV programme to the European Commission, on the condition that €50 million was available within the children and young people sub-theme. During the negotiations, issues were raised by the Irish Government about the capacity to absorb that funding. As a result, the final Peace IV programme, agreed by the Executive, the Irish Government and the European Commission, incorporates a phased approach to the delivery of a cross-border youth initiative aligned with the good relations elements of United Youth. In phase 1, that would deliver a €17 million programme for 3,400 young people. Subject to a positive evaluation of phase 1 in early 2018 — I think that Members will understand how it starts getting difficult — a second phase of €20 million would be supported.

The European Commission dictated that the original concept of United Youth as an integrated employability, good relations, personal development and citizen programme, funded from Peace IV and the European social fund, could not be delivered. So, the children and young people programme has been delayed, pending resolution of two outstanding issues: ensuring that young people can retain benefits entitlement while participating in the programme; and ensuring that legislative powers are in place for an appropriate Department to be accountable for the funding.

I wanted to read that into the record as I know that many Members are concerned about this particular issue. I assure them that we meet each week as a special team on EU funding and this is the top priority on the agenda.

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for his statement and answers so far. There was concern about the lack of contingency planning ahead of Brexit, and that was revealed in numerous questions to Ministers, and, indeed, when SEUPB representatives presented to the Finance Committee, they confirmed that they had had no contact with the Northern Ireland Executive prior to Brexit, even though the Dublin Government had been back and forth with them. Can you outline what meetings the Northern Ireland Executive have conducted, since Brexit, to devise that strategy, and what strategy is in place to, in the worst-case scenario, recoup this funding after the 2019 cliff?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomhalta. I thank the Member for her question. Philip Smith was concerned that I am here. I do not want to elevate myself and speak on behalf of the whole Executive, but I will certainly speak

on behalf of my Department and tell you what we have been doing. We have worked since day one; indeed, we were doing so before that. For some reason, your questions have not managed to reveal that we did have contingency planning in the Department of Finance and worked through the options before the vote. Of course, I was only in this post on 25 May, but we did that work, and an important piece of modelling was done by the Department for the Economy, as well.

We have been working, since the hours immediately after the vote, to ensure that we do not lose out, and the record will show that. Despite the fact that the two big parties in the Executive are divided by “Remain” and “Leave”, we have a common purpose in trying to ensure that we access all the funding that we had hoped was coming in our direction. To that end, I have met with the Minister of Finance in Scotland, Mr Mackay, and the Minister of Finance in Cardiff, Mr Drakeford, to try to have a common approach on this issue, because when we speak for 10 million people, it has much more impact with the Treasury. I have also been in touch with Mr Hammond and Mr Gauke, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to make a strong case for a better deal than that offered by Mr Hammond to date.

Mr Smith mentioned the loss of tens of millions of euro, but hundreds of millions of euro are at risk because, by the autumn statement on 23 November, there is no way under heaven and earth that all letters of offer could be received, agreed to and contracts issued. Despite that fact, I am hopeful that, if we speak with one voice and with Arlene Foster and Martin McGuinness at negotiations and the Irish Government on the other side of the table, hopefully representing our interests as well, we can obtain many hundreds of millions more. The money is certainly at risk, but, with a joint, coordinated effort and a strong strategy, we can receive that.

For the information of the Member, all Departments feed into a research and information group, which is collating information about the effects of the EU referendum fallout. In my Department, we have a special group that meets on the issue. The related issues are the European Investment Bank, and the Member will know that I visited Luxembourg to meet Jonathan Taylor, the vice president, to ask that it not only stand over the loan offers that have been made — for example, to housing associations and universities — but continue lending to some of the strong projects that are coming forward here. I am pleased to say that he has made that commitment, and, in fact, at a time when we needed good news, the European Investment Bank has committed to making available a framework facility loan for the 11 councils of up to £200 million.

Dr Farry: I also thank the Minister for his statement. He referred to the slightly better position for universities in the Philip Hammond letter from the summer. Will he join me in also recognising that there is a much wider and deeper problem with support for research funding, in that Horizon 2020 is a competitive process, with consortia being put together across many countries, and, in the absence of certainty on the right of EU nationals to remain, the mobility of researchers across Europe and funding beyond 2020, our universities are in a very precarious situation with research funding, and guarantees from the Treasury do not go anywhere near far enough?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I agree with the Member. He has waged a strong campaign for our universities for many years and continues to do so. I have met Mr Johnston of Queen's University and Mr Nixon of Ulster University, I have been on the Ulster University campus in Derry, and I was at St Mary's University College recently. The message from the universities is that this uncertainty is about much more than money, and you may have noted that one of the most eminent lecturers in Queen's University spoke about this last week. Researchers and scientists, by their very nature, thrive on collaboration, need international networks and look outwards. I agree with the Member that, for many people, what is being proposed in a Brexit is looking inwards and cutting off those links. There is a great danger that international talent will not want to be associated with research projects from our universities. It is up to us to work twice as hard and to put in place not only the guarantees from the Westminster Government but an additional commitment by the Executive to our universities in this uncertain time, which the Member has lobbied for.

Mr Wells: Does the Minister agree that there is a danger that, in all the rush, projects that are not properly thought out and planned for may be accepted in a vain attempt to try to get the remaining funds before the shutters come down? What steps is his Department taking to ensure that the quality standards remain as high as before?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question, which is a fair question. However, he might accept that, in the past, perhaps we were not as fast as we could have been. We did not move with the alacrity that applicants for European funds may have wished to see. Over the last 24 months, we have been trying to shorten the times, so that has been in our favour.

The INTERREG programme had a year's start. I think that there is €280 million. As I stand here today, about €130 million has been issued, so I do not think that it is an issue for INTERREG. I think that it is an issue for Peace funding, and the Special EU Programmes Body is alive to that. It wants to make sure that the applications and bids that are clear are top quality and sustainable. I have to say that, yes, they are under pressure. They are under the cosh, because they have to approve these programs at a much quicker pace than they did previously. Despite that, I started off today's statement by deliberately naming and praising Frank Duffy at my Department and Gina McIntyre at SEUPB. I have confidence that they are alive to the risks Mr Wells points to and that they will ensure that we do issue contracts and have letters of offer only to projects that are sustainable and will do well.

12.30 pm

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his statement to the House today. Was the red tape and bureaucracy associated with the SEUPB and every other delivery body that seems to be associated with European funding ever discussed at such a meeting?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I want to be as diplomatic as possible — I know there is no one listening. Yes, that is something that I have brought up at various meetings. This is two Governments and the European Commission and local bodies and, sometimes, intermediary bodies. It is complex and it is complicated, but, in my view, a little bit of simplicity would go a long way to getting money out the door quickly to the areas

where it is needed and where it can make a difference and create jobs and opportunities for our young people. I have brought that issue up, and I think we are getting the balance right.

For your information, we did try to shorten application times to 36 weeks — it may sound like a long period, but, of course, it could go to different Departments — and I think we are succeeding in that. One of the points that I think will please you is that I raised the derogation limits for Departments to €5 million, so that they could sign off on more projects without coming for that second sign-off from the Department of Finance. That involves a little bit of trust, but I think it has been rewarded, and it means that we have shaved a little bit of time off the waiting process for applicants.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the Minister for his statement. I warmly commend to the Minister the vision document launched this very day by the Ulster Unionist Party on our vision for Northern Ireland outside of the EU, and I hope he will give it careful assessment. Mindful of the concerns of many groups in my constituency of Newry and Armagh who have in the past availed themselves of EU grants and assistance, and of the very tight deadlines surrounding the Chancellor's autumn statement, will the Minister undertake to meet me and representatives of the east border region to provide guidance and reassurance around funding allocations and opportunities?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Absolutely. There is not enough fun in my life, so if the Ulster Unionists want to bring the actual programme and meet on that as well, we can discuss the document that you launched today, which I have not had the opportunity to study yet. I am convinced that there are no advantages to the border region you represent from a Brexit — from a Leave. That said, we are in there fighting to ensure that those border regions, in particular, get maximum funding from all the EU programmes.

In recent weeks I have visited Fermanagh on several occasions — Newry, Warrenpoint; I have even been to Crossmaglen. The message I have brought with me is that we want to ensure that there is no falling back, because we are making progress as a society, and that we do not let this setback — I have no doubt that it is a setback over the EU referendum — deter us from moving forward. I look forward to your invitation, and I look forward to taking it up.

Mr Bell: I draw people's attention to the fact that the EU referendum was discussed. Given that our Prime Minister has said there will be a Brexit — there will be an exit from the European Union — what is happening in terms of preparation for when that occurs? Can the Minister assure the House that he has the capacity to plan now for when that occurs so that we can take advantage and make sure our interests are both protected and advanced, particularly given that the United Kingdom will have now more money than it had previously?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. Of course, the detail of conversations will remain confidential, as he might expect, but I am going to break a confidence. At the meeting with David Davis, he said, "Brexit means Brexit", and I asked him, "But what does Brexit mean?" Unfortunately, he does not know, Theresa May does not know and Mr Hammond does not know. But it will become clear what the negotiating position of the British

Government is, and I think when we have the fog cleared out of Westminster, that will be very helpful to us.

Let us not hang around waiting for the Holy Trinity of Liam Fox, Boris Johnson and Mr Davis to get their act together. I think the Member would agree that we should be focusing on the work in hand on not only maximising funding but putting in place the type of growth strategy that he argued for for the economy and that we want to see.

None of us can see into the future, and, of course, tomorrow is promised to no one. I am not too sure where this is leading. I am not sure what the timescale will be. I think that the Prime Minister, Theresa May, indicated that next year she would trigger article 50; Mr Davis seemed to be more about the spring on that; and some people have said that it could be in not only two years but many years. Let us just see how it develops while defending our interests.

However, there is one thing I will say, and I agree with the Member about putting our best foot forward. The Irish Government have a real role to play here, I think directly with the British Government, in arguing for a special case. In my view, the special case should be to remain, but certainly the Irish Government, I think, have a lead role, and I welcome the Taoiseach addressing some of those issues at the weekend. But for us, we should, I think, remain committed to and focused on the work in hand while those other, perhaps greater powers — the Commission, the European Governments and the Irish and British Governments — get about their work. While they do so, I think you will agree with me that we have much to do on the ground in the here and now.

Mr Mullan: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement, his update and the discussions on the devastating impact that Brexit will inevitably have on the North and how it will impact on business and trade. Taking into account the previous speaker's question, I too ask this: on health spend, has the Minister had any correspondence with the Secretary of State for Health at Westminster concerning the supposed £350 million extra spend following Brexit? Does he agree with me that that was a blatant lie on the part of the "Leave" camp, which some in the Chamber supported?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I might wait until Santa comes in December to see whether that £350 million a week is in that particular goody bag from him. I will say this, and it is maybe something that the Member will understand: yes, the dangers of a Brexit are grave, but, at the same time, I think that around the Executive table people are united in trying to minimise the dangers of that outcome, if it should happen, and some of us, of course, are resolved to prevent it happening.

I think it is very true that not only rural constituencies but the border regions especially have benefited most, I think, from Peace funding. Perhaps the inner-city areas have done, but that also applies to the border regions. I will repeat this: we are a net beneficiary of European funding. Those who really think that the British Government are going to stand in and be generous with funding must not be aware that, between now and 2020, the British Government are cutting our resource budget by 4-5% in real terms.

In the here and now, they are attacking our budgets, and they are making it difficult for us to pay for our health service and education service. To anyone who really believes that in the future they will have a change of heart, adopt a much more benign attitude and follow through with additional funding once they have, I say that I do not

think that will really happen for Newtownards, Bangor, Ballymena, Ballymurphy or Derry in the time ahead, but I know some Members travel in hope.

Mr Speaker: I remind Members who are yet to speak that any questions to the Minister should be on the Minister's statement, rather than being a departure from it.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his statement. Can he give the House an update on the progress of the INTERREG IVa applications that went to the steering committee last week, some of which are for projects in my constituency? Will he assure the House that letters of offer for successful projects are issued in advance of the Chancellor's autumn statement?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question; he is absolutely right to focus on the projects in his constituency. I know that many Peace applications from his constituents are either bubbling under or are about to go in, and I hope that we see those completed so that we can process them. INTERREG is making more progress than any of the other European programmes. In July, we signed off €4 million for a cross-border project — the Shared Waters Enhancement and Loughs Legacy (SWELL) project — between Louth and County Down, which also includes Carlingford and Foyle. Last week, on 7 and 8 September, we signed off, I think, 16 projects and €124 million. I am not in a position to name the projects; some were put back for additional information, and some were rejected. I do not want to compromise the process, but I am pleased that 16 projects were cleared and that €124 million is ready to go through the system. I am confident that letters of offer will be issued long before the autumn statement on 23 November.

Mr McGrath: May I just ask again, because we do not feel that we got a full answer earlier, whether the whole Executive have met to discuss the implications of Brexit from the result, given the massive impact that it will have across the North?

Mr Speaker: I remind the Member of my previous words that the Minister's statement is what we are questioning the Minister on. It is really for the Minister whether he wishes to reply again to that question.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. I want to be as helpful to the Member as possible. The Executive have met since the referendum and are focused on a united and common purpose around maximising the funding available to us from Europe and to mitigating the damages of this period of uncertainty and of the EU referendum.

Mr Agnew: The Minister mentioned discussions at the meeting about Northern Ireland being a "special case". In those discussions, was the border discussed, particularly the proposal that somehow we would have a soft Irish border but a hard border with GB? Has there been any detail of how that would work in practice?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Agnew for his question. No, there has not been any detail, and I am sure that you would be first to know if there were any detail. It is my opinion that a hard border would be a disaster for the island. Of course, I am also of the opinion that the EU referendum, the vote to leave, and leaving would be devastating for our economy and for our society. I do not want to go into the details of our discussion, but it was not only at that meeting that I referred to a "special case". It would be

unfair to say that we discussed it; the meeting was focused on SEUPB and INTERREG funding. Generally, I have seen it picked up from many sources, this belief that there should be a special case for the North of Ireland, and that is certainly a line of argument and approach that I think is commendable. I hope that the Irish Government make that a focus of their discussions with the British Government.

Mr E McCann: Does the Minister agree that we ought to return very soon to the broad question of the effect — economic, constitutional etc — of withdrawal from the EU? When that happens, I will have an awful lot to say on the subject, drawing attention to the phoney arguments still being used on both sides this time after the referendum. My direct question, very briefly, to the Minister is this: does he not agree that the factors over the next few years that will most affect and most impact on the well-being, economic security and hopes for the future of the mass of our people have to do with downward pressure on wages, loss of jobs in the private and public sectors, cuts to benefits and the imminent catastrophe — I mean “imminent” and I mean “catastrophe” — in home-care services? Are those not the issues —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: — rather than the subject of this debate —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: — that will most affect our people —

Mr Speaker: Mr McCann —

Mr E McCann: — and that can only be remedied by us rising up and fighting? In or out, the fight goes on.

12.45 pm

Mr Speaker: I made a ruling just a few minutes ago that questions to the Minister should be on the statement that he prepared and delivered to the House this afternoon. It is for the Minister, if he so wishes, to talk more widely, but you have really gone beyond my reasonable earlier ruling.

Mr E McCann: I apologise, Mr Speaker.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It is very early in the new term to be apologising, Mr McCann. I take the point that you make. Those issues — building an inclusive and prosperous society, opportunity for all and equality for all — are absolutely at the top of my agenda, but I think that you minimise the damage and dangers of Brexit.

You campaigned for Brexit, and I think that that was a mistake. Every representative of ethnic minorities whom I have met in the city of Belfast and further afield who are fearful of the impact of the EU referendum vote are also of the opinion that it was a mistake for anyone to campaign to leave, especially those who work for ethnic minorities. Do not minimise the damage that would be caused by Brexit, if it ever happens — I am hopeful that it never will happen — because the modelling that we did pre-referendum on the impact revealed that the downturn/recession would be harder and longer in the North of Ireland than in Britain. While the data gives us a varied picture — it is not a clear picture — it does show that we are being hit harder than Britain by the economic impact of the EU referendum decision.

Feeding that in, we absolutely need to be vigilant about this funding, and not just because it amounts to hundreds of millions of euros going to great projects such as the

Free Derry museum, the Skainos Centre in east Belfast, WAVE, Relatives for Justice and other bodies. The impact of Brexit, which I will work hard to prevent, would be felt harder in the Creggan than in Bangor, with all my best wishes to Bangor. It would be felt harder in Sandy Row than in parts of my constituency along the Malone Road. When we appear sanguine about the possible Brexit, we do a disservice not only to our ethnic minorities or those trying to build businesses but to those who are building the peace — the peacemakers and bridge-builders in our working-class communities.

Mr Allister: Instead of being a serial “re-moaner”, will the Minister not have to come to terms with the fact that this nation is leaving the EU? When that happens, instead of British taxpayers’ money being diverted through Brussels, it will become a matter for direct negotiation with the Treasury. Is the Minister even preparing for that, and does he welcome the fact that when that happens, we can cull one more quango, namely the SEUPB?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. I have missed him over the summer. *[Laughter.]* It is good to be back. I had accused him of being “can’t do”, and he has started the new session by failing to have a special motion considered here today.

Maybe he has powers of seeing the future that the rest of us do not have. He thinks that he is superhuman, so perhaps he has that power as well. However, not even the British Government know where this is going: Liam Fox, when he is not abusing business people, does not know where this is going; and David Davis, the Minister for Brexit, could not tell me what Brexit meant. Unless you can see the future in your crystal ball and know what will happen — who knows? — your bet is on the wrong horse in this race. Instead, you should try to change the “can’t do” mentality and think about this. What if, first of all, we remain, which is our position of course? But if that is too much of a stretch, what if there was a special case? What if the Irish Government and the British Government were to fight for a special case that will not, in fact, mean that because Wales and England voted to leave, we should be dragged out of the heart of Europe?

If you liberate your mind in that way in the time ahead, who knows what possibilities you, perhaps, could dream up for your next question?

Mr Speaker: That concludes the questions on the Minister’s statement.

Private Members' Business

Stalking

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding up speech. One amendment has been selected and is 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 speak will have five minutes.

Mrs Hale: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern that for too long stalking has remained a hidden crime, which is not only insidious and terrifying, but can result in psychological harm and, in the most serious of cases, murder; and calls on the Minister of Justice to examine whether the introduction of new legislation to protect and safeguard victims of stalking is needed in Northern Ireland.

First, I must declare some interests as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the all-party group on domestic violence, and I recently took part in a BBC 'Spotlight' programme highlighting the hidden issue of stalking in Northern Ireland, and its lack of legal definition and framework in which agencies can act to protect and support victims.

The motion asks us to note with concern that stalking is a hidden crime. It is terrifying and can result in psychological harm and, in more serious cases, physical harm. I, along with my colleagues, am calling on the Minister of Justice to look into the seriousness of stalking and to conclude that legislation should be introduced to safeguard the victims of stalking in Northern Ireland. This is something I have had the anxiety of dealing with myself, and I have a number of constituents who are currently trying to protect themselves from stalkers.

I want to thank the Justice Minister for meeting me, Peter Weir and a female victim of stalking before recess and for taking the time to return my calls over the summer. The Minister will be well aware that I have been active in gaining as much information as possible about this issue, and I am glad she is in the Chamber today as I know she is committed to exploring the issue of stalking and its non-status in any form of legal definition. I look forward to hearing what she has to say.

What is stalking? Who knows? As I said, there is no legal definition, and Northern Ireland is the only UK jurisdiction not to have one.

"However, it is generally accepted that it includes repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and/or contacts ... that ... cause distress and/or fear in any reasonable person."

That is what the PSNI website has to say.

The Stalking NI website describes stalking as:

"an obsessive fixation which is powered and renewed with continuous, unwanted contact attempts to their target, using texts, emails, letters, social media, door calling, 'drive-bys', following, suddenly appearing in shops, or visiting places of work".

I have permission from one of my constituents, who describes it much better than I can, and I ask the Speaker for his indulgence as I read an emotive and harrowing excerpt, as I feel it is important to hear a first-hand experience of stalking:

"Following my exit from a five-month relationship, this man, unknown to me, had been gathering all my personal information, routines, and had kept intimate images, which I thought were deleted. He verbally threatened to have me shot and has a known history of assault. I have been followed around my town, dual carriageways, socially to friends' houses and places of work. He has stalked my friends, my ex-partner, my family and was outside my daughter's school.

He has disguised himself in passing my house and posed as potential clients to my work email addresses as recently as November 2015. He has sent letters, cards, emails, texts, and has tried to destroy my livelihood. He has painted a black portrait of me and slandered my work ethic on social media.

The PSNI have been unable to act, and I was told, unless he assaulted me, they couldn't; and in 2012 the PPS didn't prosecute.

They told me to evidence everything, but this was difficult to do as my instant reaction is to run. Every day, I woke up with a feeling of dread knowing that, no matter what was ahead of me, he would follow me. It was like a very heavy black cloud following me everywhere I went; only I could see it. I have to keep all doors locked at all times, and I do not answer the door unless I know who it is. I watch over my shoulder and scan everywhere I go. I park my car under CCTV cameras and keep it in well-lit areas. I have my children aware of the last four digits of every vehicle he drives, as I do. I get leg shakes and palpitations when I see his car, knowing he wants me dead. I have felt degraded, humiliated, intimidated and ashamed, not knowing what is coming next or who he has shown the images to. I have nowhere left to go, and he will not stop."

In 2011, there was a parliamentary inquiry for England and Wales into stalking by the Justice Unions Parliamentary Group, chaired by the Rt Hon Elfyn Llwyd MP. It found that the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was not fit for purpose for stalking offences. Two new offences of stalking were included in the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 and they sit alongside the existing offences of harassment in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. This makes stalking a more serious crime, with the potential for five years in prison. We still use the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act in Northern Ireland. I must concur with others that the chief shortcoming of the 1997 Act was its failure to name stalking in law. Indeed, the review concluded that the Protection from Harassment Act (PHA) was not an effective tool against stalking, that too many perpetrators were falling through the justice net and that there was need for a comprehensive reform.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Member for giving way and note her very personal comments on her constituent. We all have constituents who have been victims of online stalking, whether stand-alone or coupled with physical stalking. I note that the motion described stalking as a hidden crime, but cyberstalking can be even more veiled.

Does the Member agree that keyboard warriors who prey on the innocent and vulnerable should equally be subject to the full rigours of the law and included in any future legislation?

Mrs Hale: I thank the Member for her intervention. I will get to this later in my speech but, yes, I agree wholeheartedly.

The Departments of Justice and Health jointly introduced a 'Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse in Northern Ireland Strategy' in March. It includes new Government definitions of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. Included in those definitions of violence and abuse are physical and digital stalking. I am pleased that the strategy recognises the link between the two. However, the document defines stalking only in an intimate relationship. Stalking also happens outside intimate relationships and, therefore, work to address it in those circumstances needs to be included in this strategy. We must do more.

In December 2015, the Home Office started a consultation for England and Wales on the possible introduction of a stalking protection order. The consultation ended in February 2016 and we await its imminent results. The Westminster Government have recognised the need for a review of the legislation around stalking. I ask only that the Northern Ireland Assembly does the same and asks for legislation to be put in place here. My SDLP colleagues also ask for that. I support their amendment and I am pleased to have their support on this issue here today and hopefully in the future.

The law currently allows for a number of offences, namely harassment, causing another to fear violence, breach of an injunction prohibiting harassment and breach of a restraining order, but the number of convictions for offences under the Act is not reflective of the problem. In 2014, no one was convicted of causing fear to another. Four were convicted for breach of an injunction prohibiting harassment, and two were convicted for the breach of a restraining order. That alone screams that it is not affording enough protection for victims or giving the police and the courts enough legislation to prosecute. I recently asked the Minister of Justice in a question for written answer to detail the number of prosecutions for stalking under the PHA 1997 in each of the last five years. The Department's answer was:

"Stalking is a colloquial term and there is no specific offence of stalking in Northern Ireland."

"Colloquial" — if I were not so angry, I would have laughed. The women who I have been trying to support through this deserve more. They deserve the freedom to walk down the street, sleep without fear and feel safe in their home, and not to be made to feel as though they are wasting police time and making a nuisance of themselves. Stalkers are manipulative and cunning and, in some cases, use a protection from harassment order to harass and legally stalk their victims. I know of that happening right now.

We in this Chamber must —

1.00 pm

Mr Allister: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Hale: Of course.

Mr Allister: Thanks. Does the Member agree that one of the problems with obtaining a just outcome in cases of

harassment and stalking is that, for example, in our local harassment legislation, there is a defence effectively of good faith in that, if you did not know that what you were doing was harassment, you have a bona fide defence? Likewise, in the stalking provisions in England, there is the good faith defence. Does the Member agree that, to have effective legislation, that line of defence needs to be removed from the legislation?

Mrs Hale: I thank the Member for his intervention. Yes, you are right. These people are delusional. They have no idea what they are doing, or else they do know what they are doing and are doing it deliberately. They know the law so well now and are using it to attack their victims.

We in this Chamber must put in place a framework that enables the justice system and the PSNI to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators, thus empowering victims and their support networks. So, I not only call on the Minister but plead, on behalf of the targets of stalking, that she directs her Department to develop a legal framework. A legal definition will enable us not only to protect victims but to monitor reports of stalking, arrests and consequent prosecutions.

I thank all those who have taken the time to join me in the Chamber today, and I look forward to hearing what they have to say and to working with them in the coming months on this harrowing issue.

Ms Hanna: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Justice" and insert

"to develop and table new legislation to enable crimes of stalking to be prosecuted based on the stalker's behaviour and the effects on the victims."

I commend the Member for bringing forward this important issue, and I assure her that our amendment is purely for the purposes of strengthening the motion and allowing the Assembly to be more directive on the legislation that will be needed. As the Member said, there is no formal legal definition of stalking. Most experts agree that it is a long-term pattern of unwanted, persistent and intrusive behaviour directed by one person to another that engenders fear and distress in the victim. We feel that the impact on the victim, which may vary, should be at the centre of the legislation. There are behaviours that, at third hand, might not fall into any other legal category but that, taken over time and compounded, can be a huge intrusion and can have a terrifying impact on the victim. Indeed, while some of the behaviours that constitute harassment will be similar to those manifesting in stalking, a key difference is the obsessive fixation usually on one person, although we are aware of career stalkers who move on from one woman to another. Mrs Hale has painted a very vivid and terrifying picture of how that can feel for the victims, who are usually women.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker [Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

Stalking can be done by strangers or in the context of an ongoing domestic violence relationship. I understand that, in around half of cases, it is taking place where there is only a very casual acquaintance between the perpetrator and their victim. Almost by definition, stalkers are delusional and obsessive and, in many cases, go to very extreme lengths to contact, follow and monitor their victims. In very many cases, the motivation is what they

see as revenge for a woman who they believe has rejected their advances. There is an underlying societal problem in that some men have a sense of entitlement to the attention of women, and that fundamentally needs to be addressed as it is feeding that kind of control. Some terrifying stories have been reported around the world on the fatal consequences of this sense of entitlement by hopefully a very small minority of men.

We obviously do not have statistics for here, but the crime survey for England and Wales suggests that one in five women and one in 10 men will experience the manifestations of stalking at some point in their lifetime. While, as Members have said, it is a specific criminal offence in England, Scotland and Wales, there is no legislation here. In an answer to a written question earlier this year, the then Justice Minister, David Ford, suggested that his Department was planning to undertake a review of aspects of the criminal law and that legislation might be brought forward in the next mandate. Through this amendment, we are calling for that work to be completed and for specific legislation to be developed that goes beyond harassment, which simply does not encompass the full and terrifying nature of stalking.

The Protection from Harassment Order 1997 refers to harassment or stalking as being a course of conduct that causes distress, alarm or fear of violence. The stopping domestic violence and sexual violence strategy of March 2016 specifically refers to stalking, but there is no legislative outworking.

That is only in the context of intimate relationships and, therefore, would not address half of the cases that do not appear to be covered.

Mrs Dobson also touched on cyberstalking. With all the benefits of new media and social media, it is, unfortunately, a tool of control for those who have unprecedented access to the daily lives of women whom they choose to stalk. While it is mentioned in the stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy, again, there is no legislative outworking and none at all outside of intimate relationships.

A useful legislative format is available. The Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 provides a specific criminal offence of stalking. Section 39 lists a set of behaviours and, crucially, has a catch-all:

“acting in any other way that a reasonable person would expect would cause [the victim] to suffer fear or alarm”,

which covers lot of what would appear to be very minor and mundane actions that can have a terrifying effect. In England and Wales, stalking was made a criminal act in November 2012, when two new offences were introduced. The police have statistics for 93,000 harassment offences and 3,100 stalking offences, of which 1,000-plus are being prosecuted. There, you can face up to five years in jail, whereas, here, the maximum is two years for harassment.

We support the motion, but we want a specific outcome and a commitment to bring forward legislation.

Mr Kearney: Tréasláim le moltóirí an rúin seo agus tacaím leis an leasú chomh maith. My party welcomes the debate. I will speak in support of the amendment as it builds on

the trajectory of the intent of the motion, which I fully commend.

There are recognised links between domestic and sexual violence and abuse and stalking. As mentioned by the previous contributors, definitions of domestic and sexual violence and abuse were previously set out in March in the joint departmental seven-year strategy. While that acknowledged that stalking in its physical and digital forms is a type of domestic and sexual violence and abuse, and as was mentioned by previous contributors, we still do not have a legal definition of stalking or any effective legislation here in the Six Counties. That fact has been discussed by the Assembly since 2012, yet there has been no measurable progress. That is not good enough.

Stalking is a deeply insidious and invasive psychological form of criminal abuse, with shocking side effects and consequences for victims. If the targeted victim does not give attention to the stalker, it is likely to escalate into something much more sinister. As the previous contributor mentioned, one in five women and one in 10 men are likely to be victims of stalking at some stage in their lives. Worryingly, on average, 21 people who are connected with a victim will also be impacted as secondary victims of that crime.

Stalking is a breach of human rights and, therefore, undermines article 8, which is in the Human Rights Act, yet here in the North, it is not a specific criminal offence. Stalking complaints are currently addressed within the framework of the Protection from Harassment Order. However, in England and Wales, because the Protection from Harassment Act did not effectively deal with stalking, it was amended, and two stalking offences were introduced in 2012. More significantly, since 2010, Scottish law has made stalking a specific criminal offence. Scottish law has made stalking a priority crime, and we should follow its lead. We require effective legislation, but prosecution and conviction rates will also depend on training to change attitudes towards stalking, improving investigations and securing robust prosecutions. In parallel, there needs to be a concentrated focus on digital stalking, cybercrime and online abuse.

The crime of stalking has existed for far too long beyond the effective reach of law in Ireland, North and South. In that context, a LeasCheann Comhairle, this gap in our law should be closed by the Department of Justice. I commend the Minister for taking the importance of this debate on board. She should consider how the matter can be prioritised as an item of all-island cooperation.

Mr Beattie: A lot of people will think that this is quite a soft debate, given what happened over the summer, when a £1 billion property deal was linked to one political party and another party tried to —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to address the debate, please.

Mr Beattie: OK. Because a lot has happened over the summer, some people will see this as a soft debate. It is not. This is a good, strong debate, and I thank the Member for Lagan Valley for bringing it to the Floor. I do not want just to repeat everything that has been said; word for word, I agree with all of it. It is important that we show that we are a united Assembly.

We have heard that there is no legal definition of stalking, but it is clearly linked to intimidation and harassment. It is

unwanted communication, done in a distressing manner. It can be in the form of telephone calls, letters, emails, texts, sending or leaving unsolicited material, graffiti or messages on social media, which, if looked at in isolation, probably do not look that bad, but, when brought together or done repeatedly, take on a far more sinister aspect.

Stalking may also take the form of unwanted intrusions, including following, waiting for, spying on, approaching or accosting a person or going to their home. In addition to communication and intrusion, the stalker may engage in a number of associated behaviours, including ordering or cancelling goods and services, making unwanted complaints or threats, property damage and violence. These all have a major effect on the victim, and we must remember that this is about the victim. The stalker frequently threatens their victims either directly or indirectly. Examples of indirect threats include sending wreaths or violent images to the victim. Stalkers will often make written or verbal threats. They have been known to threaten violence months or even years into the future and have, indeed, followed through on these threats. This crime robs people of their dignity and peace of mind and, often, leaves them in fear of their life.

As mentioned earlier, in December 2015 a Home Office consultation paper, 'Introducing a Stalking Protection Order', described how, although stalking can take place within the context of an ongoing pattern of domestic violence and abuse, in around half of cases it seems that stalking takes place where only a very casual acquaintanceship exists between the perpetrator and victim. How big is the problem? Without reiterating what has been said, it is really quite hard because we do not have a definition. PSNI statistics reveal that between 2014 and 2015 there were 3,050 recorded incidents of harassment and 540 of intimidation. I have already —

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way and for highlighting those figures. Does he agree with me that, whilst harassment covers all sorts of ills, sins and issues, stalking is something completely different?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Beattie: Absolutely. I totally agree with the Member; that is the whole point of the debate. We take on harassment and intimidation, but what we really need is a specific act of stalking.

We have already heard what it is like in England and Wales, and we have had the figures for harassment in those areas. The average victim is stalked about 100 times before going to the police. Only 1% of such complaints result in criminal charges. What is the current legislation? As we heard, there is none. We have talked in this House previously about harassment, causing another to fear violence, breach of an injunction prohibiting harassment and breach of a restraining order, all of which may be prosecuted under the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.

1.15 pm

We have been told that we will keep an eye on the legislation in GB to see how it progresses, but we have not taken the next step forward. In 2012, the UK Government introduced two offences: stalking; and stalking involving a fear of violence. In Scotland, stalking was made an offence

in 2010. There is absolutely no reason why stalking should not become a specific offence here in Northern Ireland.

What can be done to help the situation? People in Northern Ireland are entitled to the same protection as that of their fellow citizens in the rest of the UK. If stalking is a separate offence in Great Britain, it should be a separate offence here in Northern Ireland. Having a specific offence of stalking would send a very clear message to those who perpetrate stalking, as well as to the victims, saying that it will not be accepted. Remember as well the families of those who are being stalked; the children also suffer from this. The Ulster Unionist Party absolutely agrees with the sentiment of the motion —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Beattie: — and completely supports the SDLP's amendment.

Mr Lunn: We will obviously support the motion. We will support the amendment also, although I must say I have far more sympathy with the motion, but it is entirely up to the Minister what way she moves on this once the debate is complete.

I pay tribute to Mrs Hale straight off, because it is not easy to come here and talk in such a personal way about something like that that has happened. I have had the experience, so I will just say, "Well done, Brenda, and thank you for bringing the motion to the House".

The motion uses words like "hidden crime", "insidious", "terrifying", "psychological harm" and "in the most serious of cases, murder". That is not an exaggeration. Those things happen. The mystery perhaps is that the PSNI — I was on the Policing Board for five years with Mrs Hale — does not appear to have specific statistics to highlight the actual extent of stalking in isolation from the overall term "harassment". It seems odd that, in the 1997 Act, which everybody has referred to, there is an attempt to define stalking. I remember in the last mandate when we tried to define the term "bullying in schools", and such difficulties we had, particularly in the case of cyberbullying. I believe that a large proportion of what now constitutes stalking in this country is to do with cyberstalking, which is so difficult to tie down and prosecute. The 1997 Act makes an attempt at it, almost by giving examples of what it means. It states:

"stalking is where an individual is fixated and/or obsessed with another."

It talks about:

"repeated contact with, or attempts to contact, a particular victim."

It talks about the person pursuing a course of conduct in breach of section such-and-such that amounts to harassment. It even gives the specific examples of:

"following a person; contacting, or attempting to contact, a person ... publishing any statement ... relating or purporting to relate to a person ... monitoring the use by a person of the internet, email or any other form of electronic communication"

— there to my mind is a half-hearted attempt to bring in cyberstalking —

"loitering in any place ... watching or spying on a person."

There is a fair bit there, but I agree with the thrust of the motion and the amendment that what is required, if we can come up with it here, is a specific definition of what stalking means.

I was struck by what Claire Hanna said, which was that the Scottish Parliament has, not for the first time, come up with something. I know our legislators have a horror of anything vague, so I wish them luck with this one, but it talks about acting in a way that would cause harm or distress — or all the other words you could use — to a reasonable person of reasonable intelligence. That sort of definition exists in some of our laws already as a catch-all, as Claire said. It is worth pursuing.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say about this in due course. I hope that she is minded to pursue it, and I hope that we can come to a satisfactory outcome to try to put a stop to the sort of experience that the proposer has so graphically explained to us today.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Paul Frew.

Mr Frew: Thank you, Mr — Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. It is the new term; my apologies.

I commend my colleague Brenda Hale for bringing the motion before the House. She is a tremendous MLA doing sterling work for her constituents. As she said, it is something that has personally affected her and her family. I also commend DUP councillor Peter Martin, not of this House but of Ards and North Down Borough Council, who has done tremendous work with some victims of stalking.

There is absolutely no doubt about it: this is something that needs to be uncovered. No doubt the Minister will be getting advisers coming to her and saying, "Minister, it's OK; we have this covered. This is covered under harassment legislation. That is the case at the minute". It is time that that activity was uncovered; it is time that it was put on the statute book in its own right. If we clump stalking in with harassment, which we have done, it means that we do not understand the nature and essence of stalking, we cannot measure the scale of stalking, and we cannot fathom its effects on victims and their families. If someone is charged with some offence because they have stalked somebody, it is not because they have stalked somebody; it is for some other offence. That defeats the purpose; it means that those people find it acceptable to continue to carry out their activity.

At the minute, stalking — it grieves me to say this — is the butt of many a joke. It should not be. I know that the Minister's advisers will say, "It's not enforceable, Minister; we can't do this". The seatbelt law is not enforceable, but it changed people's mindsets and it saved lives. My point is that every law is enforceable if guidance is issued. However, if we cover it up and pretend that it is not there, we will never be able to enforce anything.

For victims of stalking, their workplace, neighbourhood, street and home become a prison. The very body that contains their soul becomes a prison. Their mind becomes their prison. Their computer and phone are windows of despair and anxiety. They feel that no one is listening to them. There is no law to protect them. The police do not have guidance to support them; that is clear when you

read the stats and the evidence about how long some people are being victims. In some cases, it is 18 months, and 42% are stalked for more than 24 months. That could simply be because nobody is helping those victims. People are getting away with that crime.

It is not harassment. Harassment is many things; it is two neighbours falling out over a hedge and one person then harassing the other.

This is completely different. The people who commit this crime are delusional. They need help, and sometimes they need to be removed from society and treated. How are we to treat the perpetrators if we do not even acknowledge that they have committed a crime? We should go much further than just having crimes of stalking. If we had crimes of stalking —

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

Mr Frew: — we could have registers, disclosure schemes, guidance for the police and the prosecutors, and guidance and support for the victims. That is what we need to do in this place.

Ms Boyle: I support the motion and the amendment. I thank the proposer of the motion for bringing it to the House.

Much has been said about the current legislation on stalking and the new legislation in England and Wales, where stalking was made an offence in 2012 and new offences introduced. However, if we are to introduce new legislation, we have to look at the lessons learned from the legislation in England and Wales. Even with the new laws in England and Wales, there is much evidence that the Crown Prosecution Service and the police service should be doing more to protect victims, as evidence presented in court cases shows that victims are still at risk of violence from their stalker. As the police charge the stalker with lesser offences, the stalker gets away with a lesser penalty and remains free to offend again.

The courts and the police system, as was widely publicised in England and Wales, are failing victims of stalking and harassment. Much more needs to be done, as victims of stalking believe that the police and courts are underusing new laws because they are not trained in exactly what stalking is or the danger and harm that it causes to its victims.

If there is to be effective legislation here — I hope that there will be — the courts, the police and all those responsible for protecting victims need to be given the right training in how to deal with stalkers and repeat offenders. We need to protect people and ensure that those who commit these offences are given the appropriate sentences and receive the proper treatment so that they do not reoffend.

Like the proposer of the motion, I want to share with the House the words of a victim — I know her personally — of a stalker:

"Almost every day, he was there. He would turn up when I was out shopping for the weekly groceries. He would turn up at the school gate where I was picking up my child. He followed me into the health centre, where I had my doctor's appointment. Sitting in church with family, he would sit in the row behind me. I never knew this man until he started following me. At first, I thought I was imagining it all, but then it became

apparent that this person deliberately targeted me for reasons unknown to me. He followed me daily, stood outside my house staring in the window and walking up and down the street outside my home. One day, he got quite close to me and spoke. He said that I looked nice and that he liked what I was wearing. I went home and locked the doors in a terrified state. From that day on, that was the start of my living nightmare. I lived under the fear of this man for almost 14 months before I told anyone, frightened of what he would do to me or my family if he ever was confronted. Eventually he was, when police finally believed me and agreed to covertly watch him stalk me. But it was no easy task at first to convince the police. I was depressed, frightened and was a shell of my former self, and, to this very day, I am always looking over my shoulder, unable to trust or accept an act of kindness from a stranger."

A lot of people think that stalking happens just to someone who has celebrity status, but it can happen to anyone. I am thankful that we have the Minister here. There needs to be a robust media awareness campaign on stalking and harassment. Will she consider that?

Stalking and harassment includes behaviour that happens two or more times and is directed at or towards you by another person and which causes you to feel alarmed or distressed or in fear of violence that may be used against you. Some advice that I have picked up through research in the Assembly is that one of the things that can make it difficult for police and others to deal with harassment and continuous stalking is the repetitive nature of what may seem like small incidents. Helping the police and courts to see the bigger picture can make it much easier for them to deal with the offender's behaviour. That can include keeping a diary of events and the times, dates and locations the stalker strikes. It is a good idea to include all of that information, including keeping copies of letters, text messages and cyber —

1.30 pm

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

Mrs Overend: I am pleased to contribute to the debate, and I support the motion and the amendment. Everyone has the right to be protected from stalking, no matter what form it occurs in, and to have to the right to support if and, unfortunately for many, when it occurs. The reality is that, for many, stalking remains a hidden issue. This is mainly for two reasons. First, reporting figures do not reflect the full scale of stalking because much of it goes unseen and unreported. Secondly, as many Members have already referred to, without a sound definition and understanding, stalking can be downplayed as banter or as something that is just in the victim's imagination.

Nowhere are these two issues around the hidden nature of stalking more true than in the online world, which many have referred to. Therefore, it is important to talk about stalking not only in the physical sense but, importantly, in the digital sense. Members, especially those from the previous Assembly mandate, will know that, for some time, I have campaigned and advocated for greater internet safety, especially for our children and young people, in the form of a comprehensive, cross-departmental internet strategy. Young people in particular, who are most clued-in

to technology, are not always aware of the risks of engaging in online activity. From my experience as a mother, it seems that parents are always having to play catch-up when it comes to understanding the new programmes and applications that our children have access to daily. This means that any debate on stalking must give considerable focus to stalking that takes place online.

We know from a survey conducted by Bedford University five years ago that online stalking is now more common than physical stalking. In addition, the report found that in many cases the stalker was a complete stranger or a casual acquaintance to the victim. This shows how the nature of stalking online can be different from face-to-face stalking, where, more often than not, the stalker is known to the victim. With social networking sites and forums on the internet playing a bigger part in our social lives, there is now more opportunity than ever before to meet and interact digitally. With people increasingly uploading personal information online, there is a greater chance of that being misused for contacting an individual with the intention of stalking, intimidating and abusing that person. Where the stalker is unknown to the victim, which is often the case online also, this has been referred to as stranger stalking, and this activity sits outside the stopping domestic and sexual violence strategy set out in March this year.

Added to this, stalking, particularly online stalking, is not a specific offence under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997. Given the advances in social media and technology over the last two decades since the Act was introduced, we need to seriously consider, as my colleague Doug Beattie said, whether the current legislation, which is different from that in GB, is fit for purpose to protect and safeguard victims in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, as my party's education spokesperson, I feel that more action is needed on educating and informing children and young people on how they can keep themselves safe online and, on this specific issue, how to notice stalking and how they should report it. Stalking is not an isolated matter, and we know that there are links between it and sexual abuse and violence. As such, there is need for a joined-up approach, so, for example, the strategy on stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland covers schools having to teach on sensitive subjects such as child abuse and domestic and sexual abuse. I feel that an important extension of this strategy would be to provide teachers with the necessary skills to educate children and young people about online stalking, reporting procedures and inappropriate internet behaviour.

As this is a pressing issue and one that will only grow in the future, we simply cannot sit idly by with legislation that is well past its use-by date. I commend the motion and the SDLP's amendment and look forward to the continuing debate.

Mr Sheehan: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and thank those who tabled the motion for bringing it to the Floor of the Assembly. I support the motion and the amendment.

As has been said by almost every Member today, there is no legal definition of stalking and there is no crime of stalking in the North. England, Wales and Scotland have legislation, as we know. Stalking takes many forms. It may be someone that the victim knows well — in many cases, an ex-spouse or ex-partner. It may be a casual

acquaintance or a complete stranger. The methods that stalkers use are wide and varied and can range from sending flowers to the victim and following the victim to constant phone calls, emails, texts and so on. In many cases there are secondary victims. It is not unknown that a woman being stalked will find some day that the stalker has been speaking to her children, without the children knowing exactly what is happening.

While we have no crime of stalking here, there is, as has been mentioned, the Protection from Harassment Order 1997. Victims can take out a court injunction against those who harass them and claim damages for anxiety and any financial loss that they may have incurred. However, the point is that harassment and stalking are two completely different animals. As has already been said today, the conviction rate under the harassment Order does not reflect the level of stalking that takes place in society here. The absence of violence does not mean that the victim is unaffected. Most victims of stalking undergo severe psychological distress, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, paranoia and in some cases post-traumatic stress disorder. Stalking itself may be difficult to define, but any legislation could include a list of example behaviours. If it waddles like a duck and quacks like a duck — everybody knows the rest of that.

Legislation is one weapon against stalking, but it is also important that victims know what they can do to try to prevent it. The first thing they should do is keep a log including the date, time and location of when the stalking has taken place. They should keep all correspondence whether it is cards, letters or electronic correspondence such as emails, texts or messages on social media. They can screenshot any electronic correspondence. They should try to gather evidence, if they can, without endangering themselves or aggravating the stalker. If they can get photos with their phone, for example, or if someone is with them who can be a witness to what has happened, that would be useful.

It is also important, in conjunction with any new legislation, that the police are given the proper training. One of the difficulties with stalking is that when incidents are reported they are treated in isolation and not as part of a pattern of behaviour, so training for police is important. I rest my case there, as most of the other points have been made.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Roy Beggs, and I must let the Member know that, if he takes an intervention, given time constraints, there will not be an extra minute.

Mr Beggs: Thank you, Principal Deputy Speaker.

Stalking is very debilitating for the individual who is at the end of it. It is unsettling; it can be very frightening; it can be a form of terrorism; and it can take over their life. They cannot have a normal life; they never feel at ease. It ought to be taken very seriously, and I am glad that there is unanimity across the Chamber today.

Why has Northern Ireland legislation fallen so far behind? It is three years since stalking legislation was introduced in England and Wales and, indeed, in Scotland. For that matter, England is already consulting on further amendments with their 2015 consultation on stalking protection orders. We clearly need to get up to date and address the issue.

Typically, stalking may involve an ex-partner who feels spurned in some way, but that is not the only format. We need to make sure that it is much wider than just domestic violence situations; it can take many, many complicated formats. Others have talked about the “stranger stalker” — someone who gets fixated. I agree with my colleague Sandra Overend that the online issue makes this problem very intrusive and difficult to manage. One of my constituents contacted me over the weekend, feeling that their life was being threatened again. In this case, it was a spurned ex-partner, so it is the old girlfriend stalking the new girlfriend and hurling lots of abuse at her. It is complicated. Someone may adopt multiple identities online, and it becomes difficult to trace.

It strikes me that this needs to be taken much more seriously by the police, whose advice to date has been “Change your Facebook settings”, and that is about it. I am gathering information and intend to make sure that a much better response is required. This has highlighted to me the fact that we need much more specific legislation, so that there is recognition of the turmoil that this can cause to an individual's life. Even though no violence has occurred and even though it is not the ex-partner, it is simply someone whose life is being destroyed by someone who is trying to intimidate them online.

It is clear that our legislation is not enough. We need greater expertise, and, if we have specific legislation, I have no doubt that the PSNI will pay more attention to this area. They will have more specialism in this area and will be able to give better advice. They will also be able to approach people when necessary — it may be all that is needed at an early stage — to make them aware that it is a specific criminal offence. There will be a shot across the bow and, hopefully, that will be the end of it. Where people are persistent and ignore that, clearly, they need to be held to account and brought before the courts to address what they have done. We need all our citizens to be able to live in peace in their own home and to enjoy their activities online without threat of stalking or abuse.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Minister Claire Sugden. The Minister will have 15 minutes.

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. First, I welcome Members back to the Assembly. I look forward to working with you in this new term and, hopefully, trying to get some work done in this mandate.

I thank those who tabled the motion, which raises serious and concerning issues around the behaviour known as “stalking”. The motion recognises that incidents of this nature are often hidden and are devastating for the victims of such acts. I also note the amendment tabled by the SDLP. Whilst I would be informed to fully commit to the legislation at this stage, I am minded to consider legislation in the area if necessary, subject to the full legislative process, including consultation. I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue —

Mr E McCann: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Sugden: Yes, sure.

Mr E McCann: Will the Minister agree that, in order to be effective, the legislation that she refers to would have to include the introduction of a stalkers register in the manner of the sex offenders register; that stalking cases should be

kept open; and that, given recent experience, it ought to be easier for the women victims of stalking — this is largely a gender-specific crime — to obtain legal aid?

1.45 pm

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his intervention. If he would give me time to get into the depth of my speech, he would hear that I am minded to thinking in a similar way.

I welcome the opportunity to debate the issue in the Chamber and look forward to a useful and valuable discussion. I pay tribute to those who tabled the motion for highlighting this behaviour because it ruins so many lives. I also welcome the opportunity to outline some of the work that is under way in my Department on stalking and related matters, which, I hope, Members will find reassuring.

Stalking and harassment are particularly insidious crimes, as outlined in the motion. Whilst they are most often committed against women, they can be directed at anyone in our community. I pay thanks to Brenda Hale. It is really brave to stand up and show leadership by sharing your experience. It has made an impact on me today on how I will take this forward. You should be commended for doing that. Such behaviour is, rightly, abhorrent, and I am clear that any incidents should be subject to the full rigour of the law. If that means strengthening the law, we should consider that here today.

The nature of stalking can be obsessive, with offenders going to extreme lengths to contact and monitor their victims using a range of means. Stalking conduct can be prolonged, persistent and intrusive. The actions of a stalker can appear innocuous to outside observers but are intensely disturbing to the person being stalked and harassed. I have heard at first-hand the experiences of victims of this behaviour, as well as Mrs Hale, and, before the summer recess, I appreciate that I had the opportunity to meet other victims of stalking. Having heard their accounts at first hand, I realised that we need to take the issue more seriously.

Stalking can take a number of forms, whether it is stranger stalking or stalking by former or current partners. To me, that almost amounts to some form of domestic abuse. In some cases, stalking behaviour arises from relationships that appear to start from genuine affection but then turn to obsession. We know that stalking can take place in the context of domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We have reflected this fact under new government definitions in the stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy.

In my short time as Minister, I have met, as I said, a number of individuals. I stand with those individuals and organisations and make a commitment today that, in my tenure as Justice Minister for the next five years, tackling domestic and sexual violence and abuse is a key priority. In five years' time, if I have not progressed in some way in tackling domestic and sexual abuse in Northern Ireland, it will be my failure, and those five years will have been in vain.

As part of the strategy and in my Department's continuing work to tackle domestic and sexual violence and abuse, we are exploring the introduction of a range of measures to protect victims. They include a potential domestic violence disclosure scheme to alert people to previous violent offending; and domestic violence protection notices and orders that allow for immediate protections to be put in place for victims. We are considering a new

domestic abuse offence to capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour. We are also working on enhancing the special court listing arrangements in Derry/Londonderry for domestic violence cases, building on the pilot scheme that is happening here. This enhancement will not only improve support services for victims but seek to change the abusive behaviour of perpetrators. I want to say more about those initiatives.

As Members may be aware, a domestic violence protection notice enables police to provide immediate protection to victims for 48 hours and a domestic violence protection order for up to 28 days. These prohibit the perpetrator from entering the home, thereby giving victims protected space to explore the options available to them and make informed decisions regarding their safety.

Officials are working with key stakeholders to progress work on the development of appropriate guidance, which will outline the procedures and processes required to manage a phased implementation of the new controls in early 2017.

My Department sought views through a public consultation on the creation of a specific domestic abuse offence to capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour in intimate relationships. We have also sought views on whether a domestic violence disclosure scheme should be introduced in Northern Ireland. Such a scheme would provide a specific framework for disclosing information about an individual's violent and abusive history to a new partner where there are concerns about their safety. Although further work on the shape of both initiatives will be required, I am happy to announce that I intend to introduce them in Northern Ireland. I look forward to sharing my proposals with the Justice Committee and my Executive colleagues in due course. Analysis of the very informed consultation responses is in train, and, naturally, I will want to consider the detail and outcome of this prior to engagement with the Justice Committee in the coming months.

Work with partners continues with regard to implementation of domestic homicide reviews in Northern Ireland. Sadly, we have seen very recently the devastating consequences that can arise from domestic violence and abuse, and our thoughts go out to all the families affected by those tragic incidents, which are sadly still happening to this very day. We need to ensure we learn from each of those incidents and make certain that agencies are responding appropriately to the victims of domestic violence and abuse when it occurs. We must offer appropriate support, resources and interventions in a timely and coordinated manner with an aim of preventing further abuse.

To ensure that the justice system is successful in tackling domestic and sexual violence and abuse, I have instructed officials to seek out best practice and international developments in this area, and also to seek a wide range of views from stakeholders, including the community and voluntary sector.

Ms Bailey: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Sugden: Sure.

Ms Bailey: It is great to hear, Minister, that you are touching base with all the agencies. Are you doing any work with housing providers on this issue? As far as I am aware, there is absolutely no onus on housing providers

to move victims who are being terrorised in their own homes, although we have provision for harassment and intimidation. Our cultural understanding really limits that to issues of orange and green or political intimidation, but for domestic violence and stalking there is really no onus on housing providers. Are they included in the agencies?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her intervention. As I said, domestic violence and sexual abuse will be my overarching priorities in the next five years. My approach is to consult a number of stakeholders, including housing providers, as you have outlined. It is important that we have a full social picture of how domestic violence has an impact on the lives of people in Northern Ireland. I appreciate that intervention, but this is something that I am minded to do anyway. Thank you.

I am committed to making sure that the PSNI and other justice partners have the best possible tools to tackle domestic and sexual violence and abuse, and that the law provides the best possible protection to victims. I want to ensure that all victims can enjoy a life without fear, including the victims of stalking. A number of Members have outlined the existing law, and I think it is important that we reiterate it, because stalking is more than harassment, as some people have suggested.

On 30 June, the Justice Committee received a briefing from Professor Evan Stark on coercive control and domestic violence. During the discussion, it was noted that, unlike the rest of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland does not have a specific offence of stalking. The Committee subsequently requested details of the legal protection from stalking-type behaviour that currently exists in Northern Ireland, and my Department responded on 22 August.

Before outlining my views on the need for additional legislation, it is helpful to remind ourselves of the existing laws that provide protection against harassing and stalking behaviours. Other Members have referred to the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, the Malicious Communications Act 1998 and the Communications Act 2003. These provide a range of powers that offer protection against a number of actions that may constitute stalking behaviour. Harassment, putting people in fear of violence, sending offensive messages, threats or obscene material and causing anxiety by the sending of messages are all offences covered by those criminal laws.

Although the 1997 Order does not specifically refer to stalking, it was designed to criminalise many forms of harassment, including conduct that amounts to stalking. The Order provides that, if a course of conduct is embarked upon by an individual that causes fear or distress to the victim concerned, that individual is guilty of an offence if they ought to have known that such conduct amounted to harassment. A course of conduct is defined as actions taking place "on at least two occasions". A person guilty of this offence is liable to up to two years' imprisonment on conviction on indictment, and/or an unlimited fine. On summary conviction, the maximum penalty is six months' imprisonment.

The 1997 Order also created the offence of causing another person to fear violence, again requiring this to have happened on at least two occasions. A person guilty of that offence is liable to up to seven years' imprisonment

on conviction on indictment, and/or an unlimited fine. On summary conviction, the maximum penalty is six months' imprisonment. The Order further enables a victim to seek an injunction or a restraining order to prevent the defendant from causing further harassment. Breach of an injunction or a restraining order carries a penalty, if convicted on indictment, of up to five years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine, or, on summary conviction, of six months' imprisonment.

There are a number of other offences in relation to the above Acts, but I am not going to go through the various punishments for them because I want to come back to the whole point of defining stalking in law. The Justice Act 2015 makes provision for making a violent offences prevention order (VOPO). When commenced, hopefully later this autumn, the VOPO will be available to help mitigate the risk of violent reoffending from certain individuals and could be used in those extreme cases where a victim of stalking is at risk of serious harm, physical or psychological, from the offender.

The police would apply for an order through the courts, and it would be for the court to decide whether making an order is necessary.

As previous speakers noted, specific stand-alone offences of stalking have been created in Scotland and in England and Wales. Those offences have been in operation in Scotland since 2010 and in England and Wales since 2012. Although neither piece of legislation defines stalking in the strict legal sense, both set out examples of behaviours that may constitute the offence. Maximum penalties for the offences are five years' imprisonment on conviction on indictment.

As Justice Minister, I am keen to ensure that the criminal law in Northern Ireland is fit for purpose and that we learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions, where they can make a difference for the better. I have already asked my officials to review the existing laws on stalking here and elsewhere and to report to me on the need for the introduction of additional legislation to safeguard victims of stalking in this jurisdiction. Although that work is at an early stage, they have begun to engage with officials in England and Wales and in Scotland to identify the impact of the new offences in terms of prosecutions and convictions.

I note, however, that the Home Office has concluded a consultation on the introduction of a stalking protection order to supplement its offence and that responses are being considered. Proposals to augment a relatively new law might suggest that gaps have been identified in how the stalking offence operates in England and Wales and reinforce the need to ensure that any changes to the law in this area are carefully considered and properly developed. In the meantime, I am keen that we recognise and acknowledge that there is no white card for all those who carry out this appalling behaviour. Stalking is beyond doubt a criminal activity under existing law, and we should take care not to send the message that Northern Ireland is a safe place for stalkers. It is not.

I will turn briefly to the amendment, which calls for specific new legislation to enable stalking to be prosecuted:

"based on the stalker's behaviour and the effects on the victims."

As I said at the outset, I am reluctant to fully commit to the amendment as specifically worded at this stage. It is quite prescriptive, and I feel that, until I am fully informed, I cannot make a decision on the matter. But I will commit to saying that, if gaps are identified in the work we are doing to see whether we can find a space for new legislation in Northern Ireland, I would be minded to do so.

However, I assure the whole House that I listened intently to what was said in the Chamber and that my officials will be mindful of the arguments that have been made as they continue with their review. I will keep the Justice Committee and the House informed as the work progresses. I am therefore happy to support the motion. I hope Members are reassured that, as well as a number of initiatives I outlined on domestic and sexual violence and coercive control, my Department has already begun to examine the need for new legislation to protect and safeguard victims of stalking in Northern Ireland.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: 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 next Member to speak will be Sinéad Bradley, who will be winding on the amendment.

The debate stood suspended.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Economy

Broadband

1. **Mr McNulty** asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is improving broadband connectivity. (AQO 177/16-21)

4. **Mr McQuillan** asked the Minister for the Economy how his Department is encouraging broadband providers to invest in rural areas. (AQO 180/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 1 and 4 together.

Since 2008, my Department has channelled almost £64 million to encourage private-sector upgrades to our telecoms networks, primarily in rural areas. Currently, 83% of households in Northern Ireland can access the Internet, compared to 86% across the United Kingdom as a whole. Ninety-four per cent of premises in Northern Ireland can now access broadband services of two megabits per second or better. Across the UK, the figure is 98%.

Broadband download speeds in Northern Ireland continue to increase. The average download speed now stands at 28.3 megabits per second, just below the UK average of 29 megabits per second. While there is no doubt that this investment has brought significant improvements for many rural dwellers, I recognise that more needs to be done.

My Department's Northern Ireland broadband improvement project has already improved broadband access for over 43,000 premises. That includes around 7,000 in Newry and Armagh and around 3,600 in East Londonderry. The contract, which was awarded to BT, has a mechanism that requires BT to return funding for reinvestment when take-up of service exceeds a certain threshold. That will allow more premises to see improvements. My Department is also managing the superfast roll-out programme, which, by 31 December 2017, will provide access to superfast broadband with speeds of at least 24 megabits per second to a further 39,000 premises across Northern Ireland, again primarily in rural areas.

It is important to recognise that where fixed-line broadband is not available, other technology alternatives are, and details can be found on my Department's website. We also intend to publish further information to promote better awareness of broadband solutions. For those premises that continue to have access to services of less than two megabits per second, my Department offers assistance with the cost of installing a basic broadband service using satellite or wireless technology. It ensures that no household or business that meets the eligibility criteria need pay more than £400 to access a basic broadband scheme over a 12-month period.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his response. I am sure that he is aware that many residents and businesses in my constituency cannot access fibre-optic broadband, especially in places like Derrynoose, Armaghbreague and in the heart of south Armagh. Will he explain his Department's future ambitions and planning for the delivery of broadband infrastructure beyond the Continuing to Connect strategy, which takes us up to 2017 only?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He mentioned particular areas. I would say, not just to the Member but to any Members, that where there are more than one or two problems in an area that they are detecting through their constituency work, they should bring them to me. I will take a note of the areas that the Member has mentioned, but if he wants to give us a little more detail we can take that forward and try to raise those issues with providers.

He mentioned fibre specifically, and I acknowledge that it is not easy to provide fibre — certainly not superfast fibre broadband — to all premises in Northern Ireland. There is a particular challenge in rural areas, and that is why I am incredibly keen to make sure that Members who receive a considerable number of complaints, as the Member has identified, are aware of the full range of services available.

There is a bit of a view that if you cannot get fibre, that is it, you cannot get broadband or acceptable broadband speeds. There is support, through a range of different providers and technologies, primarily around using satellite and wireless as well. OK; those do not provide the speeds that you get through fibre in some towns and cities, but they will provide a decent broadband speed for people across Northern Ireland. A range of alternative technologies is available, and I am keen to make sure that Members, councillors and other elected representatives and, more importantly, customers, are aware of those so that when they experience problems, they know about the full range of options available to them.

Mr Aiken: I thank the Minister for his comments and for placing such importance on rolling out superfast broadband as much as we can. Further to the original question, what sort of discussions is the Department having with Ofcom, given that we seem to be moving towards a universal service obligation (USO), particularly for superfast broadband? Looking forward, what can we do specifically to make sure that the infrastructure is provided for this?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. The universal service obligation was first mooted by the previous Prime Minister in November 2015. I know that the Member appreciates that the primary policy responsibility still resides with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). My Department, and the Executive as a whole, have the ability to act as a catalyst because we have some investments in broadband through a range of technologies, but the primary responsibility still resides with DCMS.

The Government's plan was to give everyone across the UK the legal right to request at least a 10 megabits per second broadband connection by 2020. I support the principle of a universal service obligation. It is important to note that, at 28.3 megabits per second, the average speed in Northern Ireland is quite close to the UK average, as I

mentioned, but there are obviously a lot of people getting well short of that.

In some respects, Her Majesty's Government's ambitions are, perhaps, too low, reflecting, I am sure, the challenges that they understand there to be with rolling out broadband, particularly to rural parts of the United Kingdom. However, the Member will be aware that the draft Programme for Government target for Internet connectivity is that we should increase the number of people getting above 30 megabits per second. I, and the Executive as a whole, are a lot more ambitious about increasing and enhancing Internet connectivity and getting those speeds higher.

The Member mentioned Ofcom. I am due to engage directly with Ofcom on a range of matters in the not too distant future, and I am sure that the USO will be one of the subjects that we touch upon.

Mr McQuillan: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Minister, how do you rate the performance of BT in delivering broadband to rural areas such as Moneyleck, Aghadowey, Ringsend and Glenarm, which are all in my constituency?

Mr Hamilton: I am not sure whether Mr McQuillan intended to raise some mirth in the Chamber when he asked that question, but I see some smiles. As I said to Mr McNulty, I will take note of the areas that the Member raised and I am happy to discuss with him how we might be able to improve the service that customers in those parts of his constituency, which are rural, I know, have received from BT.

It is important that we acknowledge the work that BT has done and the considerable investment that it has made, especially in urban parts of Northern Ireland. The improvement that I was able to outline in my first answer is a result of not only pump-priming by government here in Northern Ireland and, indeed, by DCMS but of the investment that BT has made. However, it would be unfair if I did not say that I had concerns. It is not acceptable that, even after the £60-odd million worth of investment that we have made over the last number of years, some 44,000 households still have speeds of less than two megabits per second, particularly in rural areas. A lot of them are in the west of the Province, but not exclusively. I could take the Member, you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and others to parts of my constituency — an area that might be perceived as having better speeds — that do not have good Internet access.

I have written to the Advertising Standards Authority regarding the accuracy — or what I believe to be the inaccuracy — of some BT broadband adverts, particularly those advertising an "up to" speed. They should be advertising, particularly in the areas of his constituency that he mentioned, an average rather than an "up to" speed.

It was part of the First Minister's plan for Northern Ireland that we invest in making sure that there is no digital divide. I do not want two classes of Internet connectivity in Northern Ireland: one in urban areas; another in rural areas. It is worth noting, as I said, that alternatives are available to customers in those parts of his constituency. I am happy to work with the Member in trying to ensure their awareness of alternative technologies that they might be able to avail themselves of.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Before I call the next Member, may I refresh the Minister's memory of the two-minute rule?

Mr Boylan: I appreciate the Minister's answers, but he has to recognise that, despite all the work that has been done and all the cabinets that have been upgraded, large swathes of rural Armagh and south Armagh have not been facilitated. Will the Minister not now consider not only upgrading the cabinets and putting in new cabinets, which we know will happen in 2017 after this programme, but putting fibre-optic into premises, which is the only answer in some cases? I appreciate that there are areas that will require satellite broadband, but will the Minister consider putting fibre-optic into premises, especially businesses?

Mr Hamilton: I stand here charged with seeking to try to improve Internet connectivity and broadband speeds. I do so with a range of limited powers at my disposal. The Member is talking about putting fibre-optic broadband into largely rural parts of his constituency of Newry and Armagh. The same would ring true, I am sure, for all parts of Northern Ireland. However, that comes at a considerable cost. The Member will acknowledge that, over the last number of years, we have made significant improvements as a result of the £64 million that has been invested since 2008. I do not want to rehearse all the improvements that we have made, but we have made some. I accept, though, that there are some parts of his constituency and others that have not felt those improvements. I mentioned the 44,000 households across all parts of Northern Ireland that do not have speeds in excess of 2 Mb per second. I want to improve that, and the Executive have an ambitious target in their Programme for Government. The Member will appreciate that to do what he is asking will require considerable investment. I want to discuss with Ofcom and providers like BT what is possible and, more importantly, affordable as we look at budgets moving forward.

Mr Kennedy: I join others in pressing the Minister on the issue of improved broadband provision, particularly in all areas of the Newry and Armagh constituency. The Minister will be aware that I had some correspondence with him on this issue recently. Can we have an undertaking from the Minister that every possible effort will be made to investigate means by which constituents in Cladymilltown and areas of Bessbrook and Newtownhamilton can have greater access to broadband? It is having an impact on not only communities but local businesses.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He is right, and I accept the points that he is making. This has developed in recent years. The Member has been in the House for some time. If I recall rightly, when he first came into the House, we did not have broadband speeds even in this Building at the level that we now experience in many parts of Northern Ireland, such is the progress that has been made. Somebody behind me is saying that they are still not great. *[Laughter.]* We have made huge strides. I accept that speeds in some parts of Northern Ireland are still not as good as they should be. We should acknowledge the investment that has been made, particularly through the broadband improvement project, which has helped 7,000 additional premises in his constituency to get support.

As I have mentioned to other Members, I am very keen to ensure that everybody is aware of the range of technologies that are available. To go back to Mr Boylan's question,

the thinking is not only of fibre-optic broadband. There are alternatives that they may be able to access to get a decent broadband speed. I accept that there has perhaps been a failing on our part in not promoting those alternative technologies properly. With the saturation of advertising from particular companies, some people perhaps think that fibre-optic is all that is available and that, if you do not have that, you do not have decent broadband. I am looking at this actively. We have been working with local councils, but I am also looking at how we can better promote those alternative technologies and use the network of Assembly Members and other elected representatives and their advice centres around Northern Ireland to help communicate the alternative technologies that do exist and can provide decent broadband speeds and reliability to people in many rural parts of Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I call Harold McKee.

Mr McKee: I just have to agree with what everybody has said — *[Interruption.]* I had my hand up for an intervention. Is that OK?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): It is your Question to the Minister.

Fishing

2. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the importance of the fishing industry for the local economy. (AQO 178/16-21)

2.15 pm

Mr Hamilton: The fish sector in Northern Ireland provides excellent, high-protein products and is well placed to take advantage of the increasing global demand for food. The sector includes the catching and processing of fish and makes an important and valuable contribution to the local economy, particularly to rural, coastal communities, creating direct employment and supporting growth in its wider supply chain.

In 2014, the total volume of fish caught and landed by Northern Ireland-registered vessels home and abroad was 57,300 tons, worth £55.7 million. During 2015, the total volume of fish landed in Northern Ireland ports was 22,500 tons, worth £28.2 million. The fishing fleet comprises 364 vessels and, in 2015, employed 708 full-time and 151 part-time fishermen.

It is estimated that gross turnover in the fish processing sector in 2015 was £76.1 million, representing 1.7% of the total turnover generated by Northern Ireland's food and drink processing sector. Export sales made by the fish and aquaculture processing sector were £41.2 million, representing 4.2% of the total food export sales. In 2015, in Northern Ireland, there were 25 registered processing facilities employing 484 full-time and 232 part-time staff and paying an average wage of £17,875.

Invest Northern Ireland actively engages with the fish processing sector and offers a wide range of support, acknowledging the quality of the produce that is caught and processed in Northern Ireland. There is no doubt about the positive contribution that the sector makes to the local economy, and the quality of the products caught should be recognised. During 2016, two fish processors achieved success in the Great Taste awards in recognition of the quality of their products. Rooney Fish, which

is based in Kilkeel, achieved a top 50 listing and was awarded three stars for its Pacific oysters, and Ewing's from Belfast won two stars for its organic smoked Irish salmon.

Over the past five years, Invest Northern Ireland has offered £1.1 million support to the fish and aquaculture processing sector, which has levered in investment of £5.7 million and promoted 70 new jobs.

Mr McKee: Thanks for that so far, Minister. What can the Minister say and do to assure the Northern Ireland fishing industry that it has a bright future? Do he and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs have a plan to make sure that the needs of local fishermen are heard at the highest levels in the negotiations around Brexit?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his question. He obviously represents a constituency that has two — sorry, three: there is Annalong as well, of course — of Northern Ireland's four big fishing ports. As I outlined, it is an incredibly important sector in our economy. It is a shared responsibility, in many respects, for me and the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. We will continue to work closely together on a range of agrifood issues because we think that there are huge opportunities for Northern Ireland as we move forward.

Invest NI works closely with other Departments in providing support to the sector and recently gained approval to offer support to the fish processing industry through a new fish and aquaculture processing and marketing scheme. I understand that the initiative is now live and will complement DAERA's maritime and fisheries fund with support for capital and export marketing projects.

In the negotiations regarding Brexit, there are huge opportunities for the fishing sector in Northern Ireland. As the Member knows, I represent Portavogie and from listening to fishermen down there before and after the referendum I know that they see huge opportunities for their industry as we move forward. To ensure that the interests of the whole agrifood sector in Northern Ireland, particularly fishing, are looked after, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and I have set up a liaison group, which met for the first time a few days after the referendum result and will meet again tomorrow morning. The group includes representatives of the fishing industry and the fish processing industry in Northern Ireland. As I said, it is incredibly important that their voice is heard as we develop our thoughts and the way forward in dealing with the negotiations as they crop up.

Mr McGrath: Does the Minister agree that European Union funding has been of great benefit to the fishing ports, certainly in my constituency [*Interruption.*] that the infrastructure is there and that there will be peril in the future when that funding is in jeopardy?

Mr Hamilton: I have to acknowledge that there has been investment in our fishing ports from Europe, much of which had to involve match funding from our budgets to access it. As the Members behind me have indicated to the Member — they are absolutely right in what they are saying — he should talk to fishermen in his constituency; he should go to the ports of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie. The one story that I have heard in all my days representing the people of the area of Portavogie is their hatred — that is not putting it too strongly — of the common fisheries policy and the damage, the absolute damage, that it has done.

The Member shakes his head. I am very fortunate to have family from Ardglass, and I remember sitting in my grandmother and grandfather's house many years ago when I was a young man — not that many years ago — looking down at the port and seeing a thriving fishing industry. I remember tens and tens of boats coming in and landing their catch and it being processed and benefiting the economy of the south Down area. The same was true in Kilkeel and Portavogie. What do you see today? Nowhere near the same industry. What is the primary reason given to you by the fishermen? It is Europe and the common fisheries policy. Many fishermen, me, others in the House and other representatives will be glad to be free from the common fisheries policy and to develop a more sustainable future for fishing in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells: Is the Minister aware of the exciting proposals for the improvement of the port and harbour in Kilkeel? What can his Department do to assist with that very interesting suggestion, which would completely revolutionise fishing and the fish processing industry in that part of South Down?

Mr Hamilton: I thank Mr Wells for his question. Unlike others, who want to perhaps shackle the fishing industry in Northern Ireland to the road to nowhere, I want to help. Alongside the AERA Minister and the whole of the Executive, I want to try to restore our fishing industry to its former glory.

I am aware of the plans that Mr Wells has referenced, and I am excited about them. They show a very positive vision for Kilkeel, the fishing industry in South Down and the whole of Northern Ireland. I am aware that the plans would facilitate large, modern herring and mackerel boats to land in Kilkeel. It would be only the second port on the whole of the island of Ireland where that could be done, with the only other port being, I think, Killybegs. It would, of course, bring employment and income to the area, particularly through repairs and maintenance and in processing. As well as the processing side, there are other business units that would be part of that and would help to revive the local economy.

I plan to visit the area to see the latest on the plan for Kilkeel harbour. I understand that two studies are required: a feasibility study and an environmental study. I am happy to inform the House that Invest Northern Ireland has commenced that feasibility study in concert with the Strategic Investment Board.

As Mr Wells said, the plan is all about regenerating Kilkeel with the aim of putting fishing back at the heart of the local community and building a better future for Kilkeel and the fishing industry. I am very excited about the plans, and they have my full support. I look forward to working with the fishing industry in Kilkeel to take them forward and bring them to fruition.

Mr McMullan: You have told us that you and the AERA Minister have had discussions on the fishing industry. Did part of those discussions involve any plans that you have for talking to the other regions — England, Scotland and Wales — about the fishing industries there and with your counterparts in the South of Ireland?

Mr Hamilton: My discussions have not covered that specifically. That is probably a question that would be better put to the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, who I am sure will be very keen, in developing a way forward for the industry, particularly

in the post-referendum context, to discuss the issues closely with the UK Government. I am sure that she took the opportunity to raise issues about the whole area of agrifoods. In fact, I know that she took that opportunity in the meeting that she had with David Davis, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, to make sure that he was aware of the particular circumstances that our agrifood sector faces. I cannot speak for the AERA Minister, but I am sure that she will want to keep in close contact with counterparts in Wales, Scotland and other jurisdictions as she moves forward.

Caterpillar

3. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any discussions he has had with Caterpillar following its restructuring announcement on 1 September. (AQO 179/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Caterpillar has been a significant employer and an important investor in Northern Ireland for 50 years, for many of those years as F G Wilson and, since 1999, as part of the global US company. Given its strategic importance, Invest NI has always maintained a close relationship with local and US management. Invest NI staff work with the company on a regular basis at an operational level and at a higher, strategic level, where potential new investment opportunities are sought.

Invest NI's chief executive met representatives of the company's local and US teams in Belfast in May this year and again met US senior management at the company's US headquarters in August.

The decision by Caterpillar to seek 200 to 250 redundancies as well as the potential closure of its plant at Monkstown is very disappointing. I am mindful of the very direct and personal impact that this devastating news will have on the workers affected and their families at this time.

I spoke to Caterpillar's managing director for the Northern Ireland operations last week to confirm that my Department stands ready to provide all appropriate support to the workers affected at this difficult time. The employment service is already working with the company to be in a position to deliver specific support measures to the workers impacted. All relevant Departments and agencies will help those affected to find alternative employment or equip them through retraining to compete in the labour market.

Caterpillar is one of our leading manufacturing businesses and will continue to make a valuable contribution to manufacturing in Northern Ireland, not least through the employment of more than 1,500 people in Belfast and Larne. Invest NI will work closely with the company to help to strengthen this important presence in Northern Ireland.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his response. There is much concern in my constituency and beyond regarding the situation. Will the Minister give his assessment of Caterpillar's stability and, indeed, the position of Northern Ireland manufacturing in general?

Mr Hamilton: I had a very useful conversation with Robert Kennedy, the managing director of Caterpillar's operations in Northern Ireland. It was very clear that the decision is not a vote of no confidence in Northern Ireland as a place for the company to invest in, although some may wish to portray it in that way. It is quite the opposite: the company

recognises the efforts of the workforce here and the competitive opportunities that investing in Northern Ireland presents to the firm.

Let us be clear: the disappointing job reductions and the closure of the Monkstown plant come as a result of huge global restructuring by Caterpillar, through which 10,000 jobs are being lost across the company over the next number of years. That results from a significant, sustained downturn in Caterpillar's business, which has seen its revenues decrease by around 21% over the last five years. That is a huge chunk of revenue, and any business would have to respond accordingly. In particular, there have been slowdowns in its business in China and South America, which are both key markets, and the collapse in oil prices has had a knock-on impact on many of the products that Caterpillar makes.

There have been huge numbers of plant closures right across the company, including in Germany, Japan and Indonesia. The day after the Northern Ireland announcement, a plant employing 2,000 people in Belgium was closed, and, even in the US in its home town of Peoria in Illinois, there were job losses. This is not something that is affecting Northern Ireland specifically; it is affecting a company that is having particular difficulties at this time.

After you listen to that and appreciate the impact on 200 to 250 families in the community and on people in the Monkstown area, it is difficult for me then to say that we have a very successful manufacturing sector as a whole in Northern Ireland, but the truth is that we do. Some want to do the sector down, but I as Minister will not do that, particularly when it is doing well.

Mr Beggs: The job losses will be devastating for individual families. The losses come on top of previous significant job losses from Caterpillar in 2012, as well as from JTI and Michelin in the neighbouring region. Will the Minister respond to the calls from unions and business organisations and grant the Opposition's request for a specific manufacturing strategy to ensure that the needs of industry are not overlooked and are addressed so that it remains competitive and cost-effective?

Mr Hamilton: It is pretty sad to hear the Member, the Ulster Unionist Party and others talk down the Northern Ireland economy, or parts of it, in the House and elsewhere. After bad news such as this from Caterpillar, it is difficult to appreciate that the manufacturing sector as a whole in Northern Ireland has been doing well in recent times. Jobs are up to 80,000 for the first time since 2008. Sales have increased by 1.7% on 2014. Exports are at £6.3 billion, which is up £350 million on the previous year. In particular, on output, which is up 2.4%, our manufacturing sector is outperforming the rest of the UK, having increased hugely since 2009. I am very proud of those figures. I am very proud of particular successes that manufacturing companies in Northern Ireland continue to register: that one in three London buses is made in Ballymena; that 40% of the world's mobile crushing and screening equipment is manufactured in Northern Ireland; and that 30% of the world's airline seats are made down in Kilkeel. I am very proud of those successes and will continue to celebrate them.

2.30 pm

Let me be clear about having a manufacturing sector strategy for Northern Ireland. If I believed that it would make a difference to combating, as I said, downturns and slowdowns in markets in South America or China, or that it could deal with falls in commodity prices such as that of oil, I would have started work on a strategy weeks ago. I am pretty sure, however, that the Member cannot tell me, never mind the House or the people working in the manufacturing sector, how a specific strategy for manufacturing could do anything to deal with those particular problems. What we will continue to do is to work very closely with the sector. Invest NI has provided £270 million of support since 2011, and that has unlocked £1.9 billion of investment in the manufacturing sector and created 13,000 jobs. I will therefore continue to work with the sector. It is an incredibly important sector to our economy, and one that I want to see continue to grow.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

Brexit: Impact on Border Areas

T1. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister for the Economy what works his Department has carried out to evaluate the impact that the potential Brexit will have on border areas such as the West Tyrone constituency. (AQT 136/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Clearly, we are dealing with a range of issues as a result of the referendum in the UK and the democratic will expressed by the people of the UK to leave the European Union.

This is another example of nothing but negativity. People must have had a very bad holiday across the way: there is nothing but negativity and talking down Northern Ireland and the opportunities for our economy. I believe that a huge number of opportunities for our economy flow from Brexit. What I am focused on, and what the whole of the Executive is now focused on, is getting the best deal for Northern Ireland. We are seeking to influence, and are influencing, Her Majesty's Government's position. I had the good fortune over the summer to meet not one but three Cabinet Ministers, not including the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I had good engagement with the Secretary of State for International Trade, Dr Liam Fox; the new Business Secretary, Greg Clark; and, as I mentioned before, David Davis. We are working with them directly, and with their officials at official-to-official level, to ensure that they are well aware of and very familiar with the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland and the issues that we want them to have to the forefront of their minds as they enter into negotiations in the weeks, months and years ahead.

I personally, and the officials in my Department, continue to consult with business, particularly through a liaison group that Invest NI has set up. We have been meeting sectors and individual companies. We have commissioned analysis and, as I mentioned before, are working directly with Her Majesty's Government to ensure that we can get and will get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland.

Mr McCrossan: Maybe the Minister will visit West Tyrone to see whether I am reflecting simple negativity or the reality on the ground.

Minister, I assume that you will not agree with what I am about to ask, but are we seeing an increase in cross-border trade as a result of the devaluation of the pound, or do you believe that it is quite simply because we have pulled out of Europe? What is your view, and what are you going to do to instil confidence in the people of my constituency of West Tyrone?

Mr Hamilton: I will be very pleased to visit West Tyrone in the next couple of days as the result of an invitation from Tom Buchanan. Tom, quick out of the traps, has invited me down to the constituency. I know that the Member is new to the House, but that is perhaps a lesson for him to learn from the veteran Mr Buchanan, who has got me down for a very busy day's work. He is working me doubly hard on the day that I will be down in the constituency. I was very pleased to accept that invitation to go down to see the many successes that there are in the West Tyrone constituency.

I am terribly sorry for the Member that all his predictions of doom and gloom, which he was not alone in making, are not coming to pass. We see the Ulster Bank's latest purchasing managers' index (PMI) today. People were trying to jump all over the last PMI to say that it backed up everything that they had predicted. That was not the case. Our economy has bounced back.

We saw an increase in and a growth of the private sector in Northern Ireland in August. Yes, there are a range of factors, such as the weakening of sterling, a boost in exports and cross-border shopping, but the Member seems to be talking down the benefits that are accruing for our economy. However they have accrued and whatever the reason for them, let us take advantage of them. It is one of the very many opportunities that we have as a result of leaving the European Union. I and Executive colleagues are absolutely determined that we get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland and that we have Northern Ireland perfectly placed to seize the opportunities that leaving the European Union present.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): As Fra McCann is not in his place, I call Carla Lockhart.

NI Manufacturers: Export Success

T3. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister for the Economy, while injecting a little bit of positivity into proceedings by talking up the businesses in the Upper Bann constituency, whether he would join with her in praising local firms, such as Almac in her constituency, which have contributed to Northern Ireland's recent export success. (AQT 138/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Absolutely; I am more than happy to join with the Member in doing that. I think we should be incredibly proud of what our manufacturing businesses have been able to do in exports in very challenging circumstances over the last number of years. It was really good to see last week the latest figures published by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs — it deals with only manufacturing exports; it does not deal with services exports — but it was still incredibly good news for Northern Ireland. We were the only region of the UK in the 12-month period that it was looking at to post an increase in exports. It was not just a small increase; it was a significant increase of 9.5%. I think we should be incredibly proud of all the businesses that have done that.

The Member represents Upper Bann and cited Almac, which is a fantastic Northern Ireland-based firm. When you look at the analysis below HMRC's figures, you see that one of the sectors that has driven the increase in exports is health and life sciences, of which Almac is a key part in Northern Ireland. There was a 56% increase in the value of exports by health and life sciences companies like Almac, Randox, Norbrook and others. I think we should be celebrating that success and working with local businesses to try to encourage them to export, particularly for the first time, and to look beyond the possibilities of selling into just Northern Ireland and the home market.

Ms Lockhart: Thank you, Minister, for that response. We are certainly very proud of it in Upper Bann. I look forward to working with them alongside your good self. Will you explain to the House a little bit more about what you are doing to increase exports? I know we have seen a lot of positivity in the figures, but is there anything specific you are doing to try to increase exports?

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for her question. There is a temptation to sit back and rest on your laurels when you post a 9.5% increase in exports. I do not think we should do that; I think we should be looking at the opportunities. A small regional economy like ours will not grow or become globally competitive in the way I want it, and, I hope, the House wants it, to become if we do not look outside of Northern Ireland for opportunities to sell our goods, services and products. We should be incredibly proud, as I said, of the companies whose products, goods and services are competing on an international stage and beating their competitors elsewhere.

We have been working very closely with Invest Northern Ireland over the last number of weeks to bring forward what we have called a trade accelerator plan for businesses in Northern Ireland. That has the aim of building on the success of that 9.5% increase and encouraging many firms to get into exporting for the first time. It has a range of enhanced supports, including support for more visits into markets — increasing that from just three to five — support for travel and accommodation for firms to go into Great Britain and support for travelling into the Republic of Ireland as well. That will particularly be attractive to first-time exporters. We are also looking at enhanced support for going to exhibitions and trade shows, a new GB market introduction programme that will focus on the construction sector at the outset and a new ROI food retail development programme. We will also be targeting UK buying groups like the NHS. We will do more meet-the-buyer events and market study events to complement the range of trade visits that we already do. We will also increase the level and amount of in-market trade support that businesses will get from 20 days to 30 days.

All told and accumulated, that adds up to a pretty comprehensive trade accelerator plan that will help to build on the success that we have already had with exporters and encourage more businesses to get into selling their products outside Northern Ireland.

Ulster Bank Purchasing Managers' Index Survey

T4. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister for the Economy for his view on the latest Ulster Bank purchasing managers' index (PMI) survey. (AQT 139/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I was very pleased to hear that our private sector, after a one-month blip following many months of positive news from the purchasing managers' index, is again moving in the right direction and that there was growth in the private sector in Northern Ireland. I was particularly pleased to see that there was an increase in business activity in the manufacturing sector. The fastest rate of growth of any of the sectors was in manufacturing in Northern Ireland. I was pleased to see an increase in activity in retail and in services. There was some concern, mind you, about a slight decrease, which has been consistent over the last number of months, in the construction sector, which had been bouncing back in recent times. I was very pleased to see that the PMI is reporting, for the nineteenth consecutive month, growth in employment in Northern Ireland. There was also good news in some sectors on orders and contracts that have been awarded over the last month.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for that. He will note that the author of the report restates the underlying weaknesses in our economy, which need addressing. How does the Minister respond to the suggestion that the Chancellor's talk of a stimulus package in the UK should be replicated in Northern Ireland? Do the Executive plan to do that?

Mr Hamilton: I am very keen to see the details of any stimulus package that the Chancellor of the Exchequer wants to bring forward in his autumn statement, which is scheduled for the tail end of November. The Northern Ireland Executive, and Northern Ireland as a whole, would hope to benefit from any stimulus package, and it is important that we consider the detail of that. It is speculation at this stage, so let us see the detail and what benefits it might bring for Northern Ireland. However, you will not find me, or the Executive as a whole, wanting in pushing forward ideas on how we might utilise a stimulus package in taking up the opportunity that one might present.

Farm Safety: HSE Media Campaigns

T5. **Lord Morrow** asked the Minister for the Economy to join with him in expressing sincere and deep sympathy to a family in Dungannon as they grapple with the dreadful situation in which a young man lost his life yesterday evening following an accident on a farm; in praising the Health and Safety Executive for its high-profile media campaigns; and to give an assurance that those campaigns, which play a significant role in alerting people to the dangers that there are, will continue, albeit that, unfortunately, accidents will continue to occur. (AQT 140/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I join Lord Morrow in expressing my sympathy to the family in his constituency who have been affected by this very tragic accident. Thankfully, there has been a decrease in the number of fatalities on farms over recent years, but that does not take away from the gravity of the impact on this family, and indeed on others who have suffered in the same way. These are tragic circumstances, and the family has my deepest condolences, and I am sure that Members from around the House will join in expressing their condolences to that family.

The Member will be aware of the work of the farm safety partnership, which has been established since 2012. Again, over the last number of months, I have been

working with the AERA Minister in respect of that. We recently launched a farm safety affiliate scheme, where we are working with 14 different organisations. There is a wide range of organisations involved, including many that you would expect, such as the Ulster Farmers' Union, but there are also companies like Lakeland, ABP, the Girl Guides, banks and supermarkets. Anybody who has reach into the rural community should be involved to try to increase the message about farm safety.

Over the last number of years, particularly this year, we have ensured that the Health and Safety Executive's farm safety budget has been protected so that it can do some of the very positive work that Lord Morrow talked about. The budget for campaign advertising this year is £230,000, which is going into a range of different measures, including a new television advertising campaign, which I hope that Members will see on TV screens in the not-too-distant future.

I am very keen to work with the farming sector to ensure that we get the very important message about farm safety out across the sector.

I think that that message is working, but we must continue to do more, working in parallel with the sector, to ensure that its needs are also met and that, most importantly, the very important message about farm safety is heard, understood, registers and has an impact.

2.45 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): There is one minute left for a brief supplementary and a brief answer from the Minister.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Minister for his very comprehensive reply. He has touched on my next question. Can he tell us the number of fatalities on farms over the past five years? I accept that he may not have the figures at his fingertips, but it would be useful to have them.

Mr Hamilton: I have the statistics here. Every single fatality on a farm as the result of an accident is an absolute tragedy. In 2011, there were 12 fatalities on farms across Northern Ireland. That number had fallen by 2015 to six, and there have been four to date this year. Every single one is a tragedy, and every single one has a deep and profound impact on the family involved and the local community. We could look at those numbers and say that the message is getting out there, that we are doing a lot better and that there have been improvements. Simultaneously, however, there has been a worrying increase in the number of non-fatal serious accidents that require medical attention, so we are doing better in one regard but slightly worse in another. While somebody might not lose their life as the result of a serious accident, their life and their ability to work on the farm might be limited by its effects. Even though the number of fatalities is going down, we still need to get the message about farm safety out and embedded in the rural community. One of the things that we hope to do to achieve that is to have a new farm safety action plan, which is in development and on which we will work very closely with the farming sector to make sure that we can be as impactful in a positive way as we possibly can.

Education

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Question 7 has been withdrawn.

Strule Shared Education Campus

1. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Strule Shared Education Campus, Omagh. (AQO 191/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Department is making significant progress on the delivery of the campus, which remains on track for its planned opening in September 2020. The construction of the first school on site, Arvalee School and Resource Centre, was completed in the summer, with the school opening on 6 September. Site-wide demolition has also been completed. Designs for the other five schools and facilities will reach the detailed design stage this autumn. The procurement of an integrated supply team to further develop and construct the campus will begin later this year. In my first week as Minister, I had the opportunity to see the site in Omagh for myself, and I saw the progress and the design work that was going on. At that stage, I was able to view the still slightly incomplete Arvalee, but it was very close to completion. I will visit the site tomorrow.

The Department is working with Transport NI to progress the Strathroy link road project, which is a key element of the campus traffic management solution. The procurement process for the contractor is under way, with construction work scheduled to commence early next year. Further traffic management measures will be required at the Gortin Road side of the site, and public consultation has commenced. The Department submitted detailed information on a range of reserved matters to the local planning authority, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, in July. A memorandum of agreement, setting out arrangements for ownership, governance and management of the campus, has been agreed with managing authorities, and work has started to develop an education model and funding arrangements for the campus.

Mr McAleer: I very much welcome the progress on the site. Indeed, this is very much welcomed by everyone in the district and everyone in west Tyrone. The Minister pre-empted my question on the Strathroy link, so I will ask another one. Given that this is a very substantial project — in the region of £140 million — and that it was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union, what steps can his Department take to ensure that local firms and tradespeople get employment opportunities?

Mr Weir: I think that it is the case. I welcome the fact that I pre-empted the Member. In future, I will try not to give as much information in my initial answer. I think the programme itself creates significant opportunities for the construction industry and the business and community sectors. For instance, the contract for phase 1, which was the construction of Arvalee School and Resource Centre, was awarded to Woodvale Construction Ltd, an Omagh-based contractor. As a friend of mine would say, "Every day is a school day." Until I went down there, I assumed that it was a firm from north-west Belfast but it is an Omagh-based contractor. The contract was completed in mid-August 2016 and has provided employment and subcontracting opportunities for businesses in the Omagh

area as well as a range of social returns and bespoke local community events.

All future contracts associated with the development will be advertised and promoted through the normal channels and that will facilitate contractors and businesses to consider the opportunities afforded. Furthermore, further contracts will be adopting the bi-social principles which are supported by the commitment to include social clauses in public procurement. The construction supply chain and community engagement will be facilitated through a range of activities such as “meet the buyer” events. We are trying to encompass the whole community and provide opportunities for local people to be directly involved.

Mr McCrossan: Minister, I too welcome the development of the Strule campus and I thank you for your detailed progress report to the House. Will you outline your Department’s plans for the existing sites following the relocation and whether you have plans to utilise the sites for the benefit of the local community and the local economy?

Mr Weir: The existing local sites have different ownership arrangements. For instance, three of the sites belong to the Education Authority (EA) and the remaining three are owned by individual voluntary trust groupings. My Department has arrangements in place for the disposal of school sites that are owned by the EA in line with the guidance for disposal of public assets in Northern Ireland. Disposal of the other sites will be a matter for trustees. However, I am acutely aware and take on board what the Member has said. The future use of these sites is of strategic importance, particularly to the wider economic development of Omagh town and the surrounding areas. Therefore, I am in the process of establishing a working group to examine the issues ahead of 2020. The group will be made up of representatives including the owners of the sites and people from Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and the relevant government agencies. We are conscious that, while we have a very exciting project at Strule, we also want to make sure that the best possible use is made of the available land because that can also create economic regeneration for the wider community. That is something that all of us would embrace and move forward on in partnership.

Mr Lyttle: Why, despite a target in the Programme for Government 2011-15 to have all children in shared education programmes by 2015, have only 2.5% of pupils had the opportunity, and why are there no specific targets for shared or integrated education in the Programme for Government 2016-2021?

Mr Weir: I could go through the historical reasons for that but, from a practical point of view, you mentioned the Programme for Government. Obviously, the Member is aware that we are still at the draft stage of the Programme for Government; nothing is actually written in stone. We want to attach targets and delivery to that. It is fair to say that we have seen significant progress in shared education and integrated education through the capital availability of the Fresh Start money and through the amount of support that has been given to shared education by the shared education programmes that are being funded, for example not just by the Department of Education but by the Executive Office and through Atlantic Philanthropies. Construction does take a reasonable length of time. Most importantly, we are starting to see boots on the ground and pure delivery. Indeed, I think that what we will see in

Omagh will become a shining example of the efficient use of public resources and will be something that will embrace sharing. It is work in progress and I appreciate that we have not reached that point as fast as we should have done but it is something that will need to be encompassed as part of the wider and final Programme for Government whenever it eventually emerges.

Mr T Buchanan: Will the controlled sector support body be involved in the working group to dispose of the assets?

Mr Weir: From that point of view, we are looking at members who represent all the different sectors. I think it is important that we see buy-in, and the controlled sector has an important role to play in that.

Ownership does not lie with the controlled sector support body. In the same way, the ownership of sites outside of the EA lies not with CCMS, for instance, but with the trustees. To move things forward, we want to ensure that there is buy-in from as wide a section of the community as possible. That involves the various sectors. It also directly involves local representatives on Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on a cross-party basis and all of the relevant government agencies.

SEN Review

2. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the capital development of Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh, Strabane. (AQO 192/16-21)

Mr Weir: Gaelscoil Uí Dhochartaigh — that is, I think, the correct pronunciation; if I am getting nodding approval from Barry McElduff, I know that I have either done something very right or very wrong — was one of the 18 major capital investment programmes that were included in the Department’s January 2013 announcement. Since that time, protracted work has been undertaken to identify and assess the technical feasibility of suitable sites for the school in the Strabane area.

A business case outlining estimated expenditure of £3.35 million on the project to provide a new seven-classroom school and nursery unit was approved earlier this year, and I am pleased to advise that a site has now also been secured at Strahans Road and the purchase has taken place. These significant developments will enable the progression of the scheme to the next stage of procuring an integrated consultation team to take the project forward to design and beyond.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his welcome response. Minister, I welcome the news that you have given today, but, given that this sector has had concerns, particularly since you took up post, that you have already rejected a number of development proposals, can you confirm that the sector will be given the same priority as other sectors and will not be disadvantaged?

Mr Weir: I will treat everybody entirely on the merits of their proposals. Obviously, a capital build is in a different situation from a development proposal, but I will treat each development proposal on its own merits. Legally, that is how things have to happen anyway, so I will try to make decisions on that basis. I do not think any sector has anything to either look forward to or fear. I see that I have excited some level of interest in different sectors at times, but I will try and treat every development proposal on its own merits.

Mrs Dobson: Will the Minister undertake to review new build projects, especially for schools in the Dickson plan area?

Mr Weir: I will be looking at new build projects across the board. On capital announcements, I have already indicated that I see the Dickson plan continuing and being secure in that regard. I want first to ensure that, whatever we do, we get the best possible value for public money. In many cases, that will involve new build; in other cases, it may well be looking at what can best be delivered on the ground, sometimes through sharing. At the moment, while I anticipate that financing for the capital side of things may be a little easier over the next few years, compared with the resource side, no determination has yet been made about the ongoing budget, so I am not in a position to make any announcements today, for instance, on new capital build. However, we want to make as much investment as possible in the schools estate and to do so in the most efficient way possible, which means that every project will be carefully scrutinised.

Lord Morrow: In this age of equality, how will the Minister ensure that decision-making in his Department provides for all sectors in education?

Mr Weir: It is important, particularly as we are in straitened financial circumstances, that we have a clear sense of fairness and equality across all sectors, particularly when it comes to capital build, to ensure that we get the best value. In some cases, that will mean that a new capital build may not be the most appropriate option and we may look at existing resources, particularly as we move towards sharing and getting the maximum return for that. There are statutory duties in place for Irish-medium and integrated education, and I will fulfil those while trying to be as fair as possible to all sectors. Where there is any form of perceived bias in the system and people see schools being treated differently, that can create concern. Sometimes that is justified, and sometimes it is not. I will try to make sure that all sectors are treated fairly.

3.00 pm

Mr Allister: In his previous role, the Minister rightly observed that, under the last mandate, there had been disproportionate funding on capital of Irish-medium schools. He pointed out that the Irish-medium sector had only 1.3% of the school population but over 12% of the capital projects. Now that he has control of the purse strings, will we see reversal of that bias?

Mr Weir: I would hope to see that there is no bias at all in any of the decisions that I will make. Whereas I cannot be specific over the amounts of capital build that will happen and the new calls, I will make sure that all capital calls are entirely on a fair and objective basis and all sectors are treated equally in that regard. The merits of the build will be the significant key factor and the contribution to getting the best value for the public sector. That will apply irrespective of the sector that it applies to.

Schools: DE Budget Funding

3. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to increase the proportion of the departmental budget fund allocated to schools beyond the current level of 59%. (AQO 193/16-21)

Mr Weir: The percentage of the 2016-17 education budget currently allocated to the aggregated schools budget is just over 60%. It has slightly moved up proportionately, I think, because of some of the other reductions. When one is quoting any government statistics, there is always a slight degree of caveat to be added to that. On top of the 60% that is in the aggregated schools budget, around an additional 12% of the overall 2016-17 budget is allocated to schools from centre budgets held by the Education Authority, with a further 13% attributable to services to them. So, about 85% goes directly into some form of schools' budgets funding. For example, all special schools are paid for directly out of the block grant that comes to the Education Authority. Classroom assistants and home-to-school transport are not paid for through the aggregated schools budget, and those are fairly substantial funds.

While adding that caveat, it is my intention, as Education Minister, to give greater freedom and autonomy to schools over how they spend their budget. I want to do that in a considered way to see how we can get a level of advantage to have that greater level of autonomy, so, over the next few months, I will give that some consideration.

I believe that there are a lot of things that are very worthy in education, but I regard the front-line delivery in schools, if you like, as the key priority. I will give priority to schools funding in future budget allocations, and I will continue to argue in the Executive, within the constraints of the overall Northern Ireland Budget, for additional funding for schools where possible.

Mr Dickson: While I appreciate what the Minister has informed the House, why does he not appear to have the same confidence in school principals and boards of governors in Northern Ireland as his colleagues in England, Scotland and Wales, where, traditionally, they have given a much higher percentage of departmental budgets to schools for them to administer locally? After all, governors and school principals should know best how to deliver for their local schools.

Mr Weir: I have every confidence. The Member will realise that the distribution of funding cannot simply happen overnight; it needs to be carefully thought through. In Northern Ireland we have about 1.8 million people. We have to look at where there are direct economies of scale but give that opportunity to schools to spend a greater percentage of their budget. The direction of travel for the percentage of the overall education budget and what can be directly spent by schools will be upwards while I am Minister.

To be fair, we also have to realise that sometimes, when we compare Northern Ireland with England, for example, there is a very different school system in England that has evolved over many years. Also, to some extent — this is true of almost any form of statistics — you are not always absolutely comparing like with like. For example, we have a situation now where £85 million is spent on classroom assistants. That is spent directly in classrooms, but it does not appear in the line for the aggregated schools budget. We have to make sure that, when we talk about levels of school spend and school autonomy, we are talking on a similar basis.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I remind Members that, if they wish to speak, they should stand. Those who have provision made should let us know.

Mr McGrath: Does the Minister agree that it is difficult for principals to effectively budget in area learning communities when some of the funding has to be claimed retrospectively? Will he undertake an investigation into this to ensure that risks are not taken by principals, and that all support that can be offered to them is offered to them?

Mr Weir: There is always the possibility of some bolt out of the sky in terms of funding. I want to make sure that whatever announcements are made, even if it means taking a little bit more time and be it either capital or resources, are then stood over. The one thing we want to avoid, as much as possible, is uncertainty. If there is a particular problem of area learning communities receiving their money late or having to claim it back retrospectively, I will be very happy to look into it and see how we can move that forward for 2017-18.

Mr Logan: Has the Minister any plans to review the common funding formula?

Mr Weir: The common funding formula, and associated formula funding arrangements, are kept under constant review. There was a previous independent review in 2013. I want to try to ensure particularly, as I mentioned earlier, that there may be a little more flexibility on the capital side, but there is no doubt that anybody in education, particularly in schools, will tell you that resource funding is very tight at the moment. What I want to do is to examine the common funding formula to make sure that it is fit for purpose — that, where money is actually happening, it is going the right way and getting the maximum advantage. I will be keeping it under review to try to ensure that the best possible support is given to schools across the board.

Mr McElduff: I ask the Minister if he has any message for school principals who are feeling the pressure of reduced school budgets and the possibility of the loss of teaching posts and bigger sized classrooms. Is there any good news emanating from the Department and the Minister on that front?

Mr Weir: I always like to be the Minister for good news. Unfortunately, it does not always work out that way. I am working on the situation, and I hope to be in a position in the near future to be able to give some level of additional support to schools from within the budget. People have always got to remember that any money going to schools from within the budget is being cut elsewhere. We have to make sure we do not have our cake and eat it. The prioritisation of trying to retain as many jobs as possible will also be a key focus as we move ahead. I hope to be able to say something in the near future on that issue.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Minister for his determination to make sure that the Department gives schools more control over their budgets. When you are looking at this review, have you a timetabled plan in mind to execute it?

Mr Weir: In terms of any short-term action I can take within 2016-17, I hope to be able to announce that reasonably soon. On other more strategic issues, I will want to take a little bit of time. In that regard, it is important to get things right. Moving forward, the other critical factor in terms of the level of support that we can give schools will be getting a clearer understanding of the 2017-18 budget, because that will show the level of room for manoeuvre.

I have no doubt that we have a lot of school principals who are trying to manage their budget under very difficult

circumstances, and the vast bulk of them are doing that in a very responsible fashion. I want to see what additional help can be given to them. In the short term, I am not going to be able to promise miracles, but, hopefully, there will be some help that will be given in the near future directly to schools.

Preschool Admissions Criteria

4. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Education whether he plans to revise the criteria for preschool admissions. (AQO 194/16-21)

Mr Weir: Preschool education, while not compulsory, is an important phase of early education. If a preschool setting, either statutory or non-statutory, is oversubscribed, it will apply admissions criteria in order of priority. The preschool education providers set the admissions criteria. There is some evidence which shows that children from socially disadvantaged circumstances tend to experience more difficulty at school than others, so there has been a priority given to this within preschool admissions as part of a wider effort to tackle educational underachievement. I want to look relatively closely at that to ensure that, where we are using definitions of children's socially disadvantaged circumstances, they are the right definitions, so there may well be an examination of that. Preschool provision has moved on from the original position, which was effectively a very much rationed situation. We have now moved much more closely to pretty much every child having the opportunity for some level of preschool education. I want to take that into account as well to see whether the original intentions are now being delivered in a fit-for-purpose way. If it arises that I am looking for any proposed changes, those will be subject to public consultation.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Does he agree with me that the criteria that give automatic admission to those who are claiming benefits disadvantage those parents or guardians who are working?

Mr Weir: I want to look at that issue. We do not want particular families to be disadvantaged because they are working parents. When a lot of this was brought in, the focus was, rightly, on there being a scarcity of places. We are now at a point at which some 87% of people get their first choice of preschool place, roughly 92% of people are applying directly, and 99.9% of people now get some form of place. We have to make sure that the system is fit for purpose.

There is another allied issue. In recent years, to be fair, the Department has built in more flexibility with preschool places. Across the board, there is a good argument that, in Northern Ireland, we have roughly the right number of preschool places, given that 99.9% of people obtain a place. The issue is whether, in some places, there is a geographical disjoint so that you get "hotspots", which are oversubscribed, and, in other places, there is not quite the same pressure. It is also about aligning that side of things.

Mr Allen: Is the Minister aware of any shortage of preschool places in east Belfast? Has he any plans or proposals to address that?

Mr Weir: I do not have the figures for the individual circumstances of east Belfast directly to hand. Across the board, overall pressure has levelled off. As I said, I want to establish whether there are hotspots. Until relatively recently, numbers were entirely capped, and you could

not move beyond 26 places. Since Learning to Learn was introduced in 2013 — people are not 100% aware of this — schools or nursery units can ask for temporary variations and the flexibility to ask for up to four additional places. An approach is not filtered through the EA or the Department; it comes from preschool groups themselves. This year, across Northern Ireland, 142 additional places have been approved to date. I will get back to the Member with specific details for east Belfast.

Ms J McCann: In a previous answer, the Minister mentioned widening the criteria. I know that priority has to be given to families who are most disadvantaged and in need. In the last mandate, there was a call to look at working family tax credits being considered, as they are benefits for families who have a low income even though they are working. Has the Minister any plans to widen the criteria to include working family tax credits?

Mr Weir: I am relatively open-minded as to how we take things forward. I want to try to ensure that any prioritisation is fit for purpose. I want to look at that in the wider context, and it might involve working family tax credits. Do not forget that there is a process of welfare reform, so we will probably need an examination of the qualifiers for any of these things anyway. I want to take a wider look and ensure that anything I do is evidence-based, so that some parents do not feel that they are losing out while others are getting something. If there is prioritisation, it must be directly fit for purpose. I will not prejudge any examination of that. Whether it is a case of widening the criteria or changing the definition, I am open-minded about the route it takes.

Mr Agnew: The Minister mentioned that 99·9% of children get places, but he is aware of a particular problem for those with special educational needs. What is he doing to increase provision for them, particularly in the north Down and Strangford area?

3.15 pm

Mr Weir: I suspect you might have beaten the honourable Member for East Belfast to the punch on the nursery provision. The Education Authority is doing a strategic review of that. It is critical to note that there was an increase in numbers this year that had to then be catered for. The overall Education Authority review will try to put something in place for 2017-18 that is much more fit for purpose. That will involve, for instance, the input of not just the Department and others but the parent/stakeholder group in particular and a group of professionals who will give advice on it. As for the timescale, I think we are looking at a report initially appearing and then, so that it can be fully implemented, the eventual report being with the Department in March 2017, with, hopefully, full implementation of something that is fit for purpose from September 2017 onwards. It is important that we get that sort of provision right and get it right in a more long-term manner. Inevitably, at times, we and the Education Authority, in its placements, will have to move in quickly in particular circumstances to try to provide additional support. I think it is important that we do that in a much more strategic way if possible so that, hopefully, some of the problems that have arisen do not arise again.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That ends the period for listed questions. We will now move to 15 minutes of topical questions. As topical question 1 has been withdrawn, I call Alex Easton.

St Columbanus's College: Temporary Classrooms

T2. **Mr Easton** asked the Minister of Education, in light of the increased number of pupils at St Columbanus's College in Bangor, whether he has any plans to provide an increased number of temporary classrooms. (AQT 147/16-21)

Mr Weir: I am aware of the very active interest in this issue, and I know that the Member has lobbied very strongly on it. There is obviously a longer-term issue for St Columbanus's being in many ways the victim of its success, given the sheer volume of people who are looking in. As for temporary provision, I understand that the school has been provided with two additional mobile classrooms for 2016-17. Those are due for completion very soon. There are also, I think, due to be two additional modular classrooms in time for 2017-18.

Officials from the estates operations team have been working closely with the school to address accommodation needs and are, I think, due to meet the school principal tomorrow to discuss potential future minor works. We were able to announce a certain amount of investment in minor works over the summer period. Over the last five years — I appreciate that for a lot of schools this will be a poor substitute for, ultimately, a decision on a new build — the school has received an investment of around £1·3 million for various projects involving minor works that cover a range of things such as not just the temporary classrooms but window replacement, lifts, toilet refurbishment, changing room refurbishment, partial rewiring, concrete repairs and road barrier installation.

Mr Easton: Does the Minister believe that the temporary classrooms will definitely be in place for next year, given that there will be an increase in numbers again? Is that a definite?

Mr Weir: Again, I want to be in the position where direct announcements are done with a degree of definiteness. To give the Member an idea of numbers, there was an approval a while ago to increase enrolment in a phased manner from about 525 to an eventual position of 750 in 2025. Following a scoping exercise by the Education Authority, a double modular unit to be used as general classrooms was originally due to be on-site for the start of September. The advice we have from the Education Authority is that it will be in place for mid-September, so it will be happening literally in the next few days. Similarly, for 2017-18, we will work closely with the school and the EA to ensure that the further double mobile is in place for September 2017. Although I appreciate that neither will provide a long-term solution, they will at least ease a certain level of the burden on the school. I met the Member and representatives from the school, and I think we had a very useful discussion on the issue to try to provide that level of alleviation.

Transfer Test: Preparation of Children

T3. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Education whether he is concerned by the level of opposition being expressed by principals, teachers, parents, trade unions and some Churches to his decision to reverse departmental policy and thus allow teachers to mentor primary-school children ahead of the transfer test. (AQT 148/16-21)

Mr Weir: In the preparation of the children? Obviously, it is up to individual parents to enter their children for the tests. From that point of view, there is no other education issue that I could pick out on which there is a greater division of opinion in society as a whole and in the House. The Member mentioned concern about the level of opposition. I am quite heartened by the number of people from all the different groups who have been in touch with me who have said that this is the right way forward. In particular, I am heartened by the number of parents who have been in contact and even people whom I have run into in the street who are very happy with the decision.

I appreciate that the nature of this decision meant that, irrespective of whether it was me or the previous Minister who made it, there would be people who would be opposed to it. We have to reflect the reality of the situation. There is a division on the issue of selection and the transfer test, but it is also the case that, irrespective of our own individual views on that, it is something that is legally allowable. It is clearly happening, and it is here to stay.

Earlier, Mr Dickson mentioned the issue of autonomy in schools. This is essentially a memo that is permissive in nature. To be perfectly honest, it is permissive to bring out into the open what has been happening in an awful lot of schools behind closed doors up until now. They have not necessarily been admitting it to the Department of Education, but the kind of preparation that is ongoing is something that is happening at present. This allows simply for the threat to be removed. If I can remove threats from schools, that is an important step forward and it is one that a lot of people in Northern Ireland will strongly welcome.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for his response. What guarantees can you offer those pupils, and their parents, who are not undergoing the transfer test that they will not be sidelined or left behind if teachers decide to prepare those pupils who want to sit the transfer test in valuable class time?

Mr Weir: I have great faith in schools to provide sensible solutions. I am not compelling schools to do anything; it is up to the schools themselves to do it. I reiterate that this is something that is already happening. It may not have been officially sanctioned until now and it may be a situation that has not been officially admitted to, but every child will receive the full curriculum. There is no diminution of that, and I have faith that schools are putting in place the arrangements that they want in order to ensure that. Our schools have a great pastoral record, and I have faith in their ability to look after the education of all their children. I believe that schools will deal with that opportunity and the challenge that lies ahead for them.

School Transport

T4. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Education whether all schoolchildren who are entitled to school transport are receiving school transport. (AQT 149/16-21)

Mr Weir: From that point of view, I know that there is fairly extensive entitlement to school transport. Indeed, where someone has been denied school transport and feels that they should be receiving it, there is an appeals mechanism on that basis. At the moment, there is about £75 million in the budget for home-to-school transport, so it is pretty extensive. Can I guarantee that everybody who is entitled to it is getting it? To the best of my knowledge, that is the

case, and, indeed, there are appeals mechanisms for that. Can I guarantee that everybody who is potentially entitled to claim it does so? I suspect that it is not necessarily the case that there is universal claiming in any situation. There will be different transport arrangements for some people in that regard. I would encourage anybody who is entitled to take it up to do so, but I cannot give a guarantee that there is 100% take-up.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. Will he resist all or any attempts by the Education Authority to reduce rural school transport in future?

Mr Weir: I appreciate that there is a wider context in which we look at where budget lines are divided. School transport is under the authority of the Education Authority; ultimately, it will take the decisions. We want to protect the various services as best we can.

However, we are in a difficult financial position. If, for example, we are trying to protect the very front line of the money going into the aggregated schools budget, there will be certain pressures to make efficiencies within the Education Authority. The question is whether every decision made will be the best decision. Indeed, I am sure that some will argue that not every decision that comes out of the House is necessarily the best one possible.

There needs to be maximum protection, but I will not dictate to the Education Authority. I will not say, "You've a certain amount that you have to save, and here is precisely the way that you have to save it." There has to be a degree of judgement. Indeed, one of the advantages of the Education Authority is that, as well as having representatives of all sectors in society, its board now has a political dimension through having representatives of the four largest parties. The authority will have to make a judgement call. Can I give a guarantee that there will not be any change at all to school transport? No, I cannot give that guarantee, but I hope that anything that is done across any sector is proportionate and protects the most vulnerable.

School Budgets 2016-17

T5. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of schools that are operating with no sight of their 2016-17 final budget. (AQT 150/16-21)

Mr Weir: The budgets were sent out, as I understand it, just before Easter, so all schools should have sight of their final budget. The Education Authority has particular arrangements for special schools, and their budget is spent differently, but all schools should have their final budget.

The only issue is that if, for example, as part of the process, I am able to find additional money to give support to schools, that will impact on their 2016-17 budget. I appreciate that, on one hand, that creates a certain awkwardness for schools. On the other hand, I would prefer to be in a position that, if I can do anything additional to help, I will do it, but I do not want schools to keep feeling that their finances are being drip-fed to them.

To be fair, we are caught within the wider circumstances of where the Executive Budget will be. It is also important, as much as possible, for schools to get an early sight of what their funding will be for next year and that that information is sent out as quickly as possible. That will be dependent

on what level of support the Department gets from the Executive.

I am sure that the Member realises that I may have a particular bias in saying that I want as much funding as possible go into education. However, in the Executive as a whole, there will be a wide range of pressures and of very good things that they will want to sponsor, so it is also a question of how the cake is divided.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for his response. What engagement has he had with the Education Authority on special school budgets and the supposed time frame for those final drafts?

Mr Weir: I am engaging directly with the Education Authority on a range of issues. There has not been a direct conversation on the detail of special schools' budgets, but I will have fairly regular meetings with the Education Authority about those and whether there are any hold-ups.

As we look towards autonomy, we need to consider what greater autonomy we can give: for example, whether it is across the board or on a pilot basis. The Department will need to look at where the division is between direct funding for special schools and what greater autonomy they can be given. We want something that is fit for purpose, and that will also be under consideration as we move ahead.

Irish-medium Sector

T6. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Education to reassure the Irish-medium sector that he does not have an agenda against the Irish language and that he will treat the sector fairly in the future. (AQT 151/16-21)

Mr Weir: I will treat all sectors fairly. I will not discriminate against or give favourable treatment to a sector. All proposals will be judged on their merits. I am happy to give that assurance to the Member.

Mr Sheehan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer, but can he tell us how many development proposals from the Irish-medium sector he has approved or rejected since he assumed office?

Mr Weir: I would be happy to give the details to the Member. I have treated each development proposal on its merits. We have to look, particularly as we move towards area planning, at having sustainability across all sectors. That means there will have to be a discussion on how best to deliver for all sectors. We will be happy to write to the Member with the detail of the number of development proposals that have been put forward and dealt with and the answer in each of those cases. I think that that is largely a matter of public record.

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Time for questions is up. Members should take their ease while we change at the top Table.

Mr F McCann: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I would like to apologise that I was not present for a topical question during Economy questions. It completely slipped my mind.

Mr Weir: Put him in detention. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I do not know whether I will take the Minister's recommendation. Go raibh maith agat as sin a dhéanamh. Thanks very much for doing that.

(Mr Speaker [Mr Newton] in the Chair)

Private Members' Business

Stalking

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly notes with concern that for too long stalking has remained a hidden crime, which is not only insidious and terrifying, but can result in psychological harm and, in the most serious of cases, murder; and calls on the Minister of Justice to examine whether the introduction of new legislation to protect and safeguard victims of stalking is needed in Northern Ireland. – [Mrs Hale.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Justice" and insert

"to develop and table new legislation to enable crimes of stalking to be prosecuted based on the stalker's behaviour and the effects on the victims." – [Ms Hanna.]

Ms S Bradley: At the outset, I would like to place on record my unreserved support for the motion and the amendment. I further wish to thank Brenda Hale for bringing this, perhaps overdue, motion in front of the House. My party colleague Claire Hanna and others have rightly highlighted the need to ensure that efficient, clear and accessible legislation is put in place to target the increasingly common and serious crime of stalking. Many across the House highlighted the fact that there is no legal definition, but good attempts and suggestions have been presented today for consideration. Contributions across the House made for difficult listening at times, and there has been a very truthful sharing of information. Researching the topic also threw up uncomfortable reading material and some shocking statistics, which have been also shared across the House.

Many Members rightly referred to reports suggesting that the misuse of social media is perhaps now helping to fuel the increasing incidence of stalking. It is also true that many high-profile cases have given us an insight into the horrors experienced by those subjected to this heinous and often delusional crime. We are all now aware that a crime once perceived to be reserved for celebrities and high-profile personalities no longer conforms to such boundaries. The Office for National Statistics states that one in six women and one in 12 men have experienced stalking offences, but some argue that even that shocking statistic is grossly underestimated. That is a notion that I subscribe to. Consider that, as has already been reported today, most people receive their 100th incident before they actually contact police and report the stalking. We cannot help but ask this question: how many cases go unreported? For now, we might just have to accept that we do not have an accurate reading of the true scale of the issue. While legislation is lacking and stalking has not been given due recognition as a serious crime, those affected by it are more likely to feel disempowered in reporting this crime. There is, however, sufficient evidence in the public domain for the House to recognise and realise the need for early and effective legislation.

It was reassuring to listen to the House speak in unison on the motion and the amendment. I welcome the fact that the Minister of Justice was present throughout the debate

to hear the overwhelming support that exists for new legislation for this specific crime. The Minister expressed full support for the motion but, unfortunately, fell short of giving 100% support to the amendment.

I recognise that, but, as the topic is discussed further and the knowledge base deepens, I ask the Minister to reflect on her position. I also ask that she takes her steer from the people who are affected by the crime of stalking.

The Minister rightly linked the debate on stalking to domestic violence. The Metropolitan Police Service found that 40% of victims of domestic murder had also been stalked, but legislation on stalking as a specific crime is missing from our statute books. Members across the House rightly pointed out that any legislative framework must reach deep into the roots of the problem and help cultivate a culture that enables those targeted by stalkers to come forward with confidence. Suggestions for the requirements include up-to-date training for the Police Service and the introduction of additional services and support contact points. The framework will also require authorities to have the ability to take swift and immediate action to protect the well-being of those affected. There must be properly policed restraining orders and the notion of national and international stalker registers, particularly for those who are identified as persistent stalkers.

Ultimately, if an alleged stalker is found guilty, sentencing must reflect the harrowing and serious nature of their crime. Likewise, rehabilitation should form a large part of any sentencing. Perpetrators' perceptions of reality need to be broken down, allowing them to see things from the perspective of the targeted person. Of course, the fear of danger does not end there for the person stalked. There will always be that dreaded release date. The stalked person will inevitably fear an aggrieved stalker presenting to seek revenge.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you. Good legislation and failed legislation on stalking has already been introduced in many countries. It is now time to study it and make a Northern Ireland model. Stalking is a cruel, manipulative and appalling crime —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Perpetrators should know that any law will reflect that.

Mrs Cameron: I rise to support the motion and to thank my colleague Brenda Hale for bringing this incredibly relevant issue to the House today. I declare an interest as the chair of the all-party group on domestic violence.

As we are the only part of the United Kingdom without specific legislation to deal with stalking, the people of Northern Ireland are being left in a vulnerable and exposed position. It is incredibly alarming that people in our part of the United Kingdom are not being afforded the same protection and are at greater risk from perpetrators and their actions than our neighbours in mainland UK. With the increased use of social media, the opportunities to make a person's life a misery are infinite and easily accessible. Societal changes have meant that the lines of what is acceptable behaviour are often blurred, particularly with the Internet and social media. Without legislation, victims are at risk of serious psychological and physical harm whilst perpetrators are allowed, without sufficient

deterrence, to continue and, in most cases, escalate their behaviour. With so many victims of stalking falling between the cracks in legislation, we are failing to protect victims from serious mental distress, physical injury and, in the worst cases, rape and even murder.

Most of you will be aware of my work with Women's Aid. Sadly, it appears that instances of stalking go hand in hand with domestic violence. With one in eight crimes reported to the PSNI being of a domestic nature, it is clear that, with such a high volume of occurrences, stalking will undoubtedly be involved in many of those cases. It is widely recognised that domestic violence has a huge impact on the economy through the cost to the health service and the justice system and in providing emergency housing. Women's Aid estimates the cost to be in the region of £180 million per year. That is a financial burden that Northern Ireland can ill afford. Given the financial implications alone, we should be looking to multi-agency and joined-up working to ensure that we do all that we can to remove this blight on our society.

The introduction of specific stalking legislation would be a small but enormously impactful step towards dealing with stalking, particularly in the context of domestic violence. With stalking being such a menacing and underhand offence, victims often do not realise that it is happening until it has spiralled to a distressing level. Victims can suffer anything from being watched, physically and virtually, to harassment and intimidation. While England and Wales have recognised that the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 was not specific enough to deal with stalking, Northern Ireland has not given the PSNI and the courts the powers to deal effectively with the offence. Under current legislation, stalking is not recognised as specific behaviour, and it falls short in recognising that serious alarm or distress causes the victim harm. That, therefore, means that perpetrators are only prosecuted under a section 2 summary offence as no violence has occurred, are dealt with at Magistrates' Court level and can be free to resume their threatening, intimidating and sinister behaviour within months of release from prison. Given the scope for the problem to grow exponentially with the explosion of social media, we urgently need legislation to protect people from unwanted or unsolicited contact.

The changes to the law in England and Wales occurred following a parliamentary inquiry into the efficacy of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 in dealing with the perpetrators of stalking. The inquiry found that the law was not fit for purpose, and changes were made that reflected changes already made to Scottish law in 2010. I call on the Minister of Justice to recognise that, if a law has been recognised as not fit to protect victims of stalking in England, Wales and Scotland, it should not be accepted for the people of Northern Ireland.

I want to add some comments from the other Members who contributed to the debate. I am pleased that so many took part in a very full debate and, indeed, that there was support across the Chamber for the motion and the amendment. I very much welcome that.

The proposer of the motion, Brenda Hale, spoke about her experience of helping constituents in dealing with what really is a crime of stalking. She talked about the fact that there is no legal definition of stalking. She very powerfully quoted a victim of stalking and the horrors of that experience. She talked about the PHA and said that that

was not an effective tool against stalking, and she spoke of the Department's strategy and the need to include stalking in that strategy. She welcomed the amendment and the support from the SDLP for the DUP motion and called on the Minister to deal with the lack of provision to deal effectively with stalking in legislation.

Claire Hanna proposed the amendment to support and strengthen the motion. That was very much welcomed. She said that some men felt a sense of entitlement towards some women. She also talked about the fact that there was no legislation on stalking in Northern Ireland. She mentioned the stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy and how it does not deal effectively with stalking. She wanted a commitment from the Minister to address stalking legislation.

Declan Kearney said that there had been no measurable progress on the subject, despite it having been discussed around the Chamber since 2012. He also mentioned that men and women were impacted by stalking.

Doug Beattie said that the debate on the motion might be looked on as a "soft debate", but he clarified that by saying that it was not. He said that stalking is a crime that robs people of their dignity — how true is that? He said that there was a need for a specific offence of stalking. I think that he was the first to mention that there may be 100 incidents of stalking before a report is made to the police. We know that that is even worse than the domestic violence statistics, where, I think, there are over 35 incidents before a report is made to the police.

Trevor Lunn supported the motion and the amendment. He paid tribute to Mrs Hale for bringing the motion to the Chamber. He talked about the Policing Board not having the statistics to record stalking and compared the difficulty of defining bullying and cyberbullying with stalking.

Paul Frew spoke next. He said that stalking could be and sometimes was the butt of many a joke. He referred to the seat belt law and what is enforceable and talked about how that law had saved lives. He also said that workplaces, neighbourhoods, streets and homes were becoming prisons for victims of stalking and, again, that there was no law to protect them. He said that harassment was a completely different subject and that stalkers were often delusional.

Michaela Boyle spoke next. She said that we needed to look at the lessons learned in the rest of the UK in bringing forward stalking legislation. She also said that the courts needed the right training and that appropriate sentencing was required. She asked the Minister for a robust media campaign on the subject.

Sandra Overend said that the right to be protected and supported for those who are being stalked was needed.

She said that there was more opportunity than ever to stalk through social media and talked at length about the online situation. That requires, she suggested, in what was a very good point, more action to educate children on the subject of appropriate Internet behaviour.

3.45 pm

Pat Sheehan encouraged victims to keep a log and evidence of stalking behaviour. He also mentioned that our police officers required proper training to deal with the subject.

Roy Beggs talked about the different forms of stalking that take place.

That is a summary of a lot of what was mentioned here today. The mood of the House was very much in favour of making stalking a specific offence under the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order. That would, of course, bring us into line with the rest of the United Kingdom, which I would welcome.

As the chair of the all-party group on domestic violence and from my work with Women's Aid, I have had a unique insight into the aftermath and devastation that domestic violence has for victims and families. We must enforce the message that violence against a partner is simply not acceptable. I appreciate that not all instances of stalking take place in the context of domestic violence, but I believe that the introduction of legislation to isolate it as a specific offence will identify some much-needed boundaries and act as a deterrent to aggressive and unacceptable behaviour. It is important too, when the 2016 consultation results are published, that we look at the recommendations to see whether any can be included in a possible stalking protection order for Northern Ireland.

Finally, I welcome the Minister's comments so far and her public commitment to dealing with domestic violence and stalking. It is brave of her at the outset to make these bold statements, and I look forward to working with her on the Justice Committee and seeing this type of legislation come to fruition.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern that for too long stalking has remained a hidden crime, which is not only insidious and terrifying, but can result in psychological harm and, in the most serious of cases, murder; and calls on the Minister of Justice to develop and table new legislation to enable crimes of stalking to be prosecuted based on the stalker's behaviour and the effects on the victims.

Housing Selection Scheme

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 to make a winding-up speech. All other contributors will have five minutes.

Mr F McCann: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to bring forward a replacement to the housing selection scheme that ensures a fairer and more transparent system of assessing housing need.

The motion highlights the serious difficulties with the housing selection scheme. I have raised the issue in many different forums and meetings over the years, most recently with the Minister for Communities several months ago. The Minister accepted that there were concerns about the present system used by the Housing Executive to allocate points to those on social housing waiting lists. There is a need to move forward. I accept that the Minister is not long in post and will need time to reflect on how to deal with the problem, but I also believe that it is timely for the Assembly to debate the workings of the scheme.

We need to focus on making changes to the selection scheme that take into consideration its limitations when it comes to what are known as areas of high demand and also the allocation of points to a number of categories of people whose serious circumstances are not recognised under the present system. The motion calls on the Minister for Communities to bring forward a replacement to the housing selection scheme that is fair and transparent. It is widely recognised that the present scheme has serious flaws and condemns people living in areas of high demand, such as west Belfast, north Belfast and Derry, to lengthy stays on waiting lists before being moved to a home, although there are other parts of the North where problems exist. Failure to grasp the nettle now will condemn applicants to lengthy stays in hostels, in overcrowded conditions.

The scheme has other deficiencies. For many, declaring as homeless is a very traumatic experience. For many, it begins in a Housing Executive office, which, in my experience, is intimidating and lacks privacy, especially the Belfast office. It needs to be observed to appreciate the seriousness of the first stages of declaring as homeless. I have heard it described by those who have gone through the process as being a cattle market with little privacy. I have also heard from those who work in the executive that little training is available for those who work on the front desk on how they should speak to or inform people who are looking to be placed on the waiting list and pointed.

That is a life-changing step for many. The journey from first contact through the selection scheme to gaining the right level of points and on to being allocated a home impacts on parents and children alike. I understand that, in past years, there have been a number of reviews of the housing selection scheme, yet little in the way of firm proposals. The more recent review has been the pre-consultation review, which made suggestions around a system of banding, or choice-based lettings or a different way of allocating points. Many of the suggestions do not take in the reality of housing in the North and the difficulties that exist for housing providers and those looking for housing.

I believe that the Minister wants to move the issue forward. I say by way of advice that, when looking at a way forward, there is a wide range of experts out there, from the voluntary housing sector, the Housing Executive, housing associations and the Department, who, if pulled together, could look at the present system and its flaws to see whether it could be made to work. Doing nothing is not an option.

It is heartbreaking for a family to begin the journey of declaring as homeless. When you declare as homeless and have dependent children, the Housing Executive has a responsibility to find you temporary accommodation in either a homeless hostel or a single let. You are then assessed and allocated a level of points that it says reflects your circumstances; for example, 70 points for being homeless and an assortment of other points. Many of those who accept a place in a hostel at the declaration stage might go into it with 120 or 130 points and, at the end of six months, get an additional 20 points, reflecting the length of time spent there. That could bring them up to 150 points, but if they had indicated that their area of choice was an area of high demand, where they might need family support, they would need 180 to 200 points to be housed. As a result, they could then sit for years in a hostel, with little chance of being housed. The housing selection scheme does not take that into consideration. I have dealt with cases in which people went into hostels when their first child was born, and, when the child had started primary school, they still had little chance of being housed.

There are the most serious of situations. People may be in a very abusive relationship and, when declaring as homeless, report that they are in constant danger of attack, only to find that the selection scheme lets them down and will award them possibly only an additional 20 points. The same goes for people who may be under threat in communities from antisocial elements or violent neighbours. Their life may be in danger, but what they are offered is to take part in mediation with the very people who are intimidating them. Many leave their homes and head into the private rented sector after being awarded only 20 points, which does not reflect the seriousness of their circumstances.

You have the situation, however, of people claiming that they are under threat from a group or have been sent a bullet through the post. After going to the police, they can be awarded 200 points or more, which puts them at the top of the waiting list. That cannot be fair. Many believe that those claims of intimidation are bogus. When the housing provider contacts the police, they confirm that they are investigating a threat to the life of the applicant and that they believe the person's life to be in danger. I have spoken to the PSNI, which has told me that there is little in the way of investigation into those cases, and that is obviously very frustrating for housing providers and those who know that they are being cheated out of a home. Indeed, they may have been sitting at the top of the waiting list at that particular time. They know that many of these claims are bogus and are being used as a method of jumping the housing waiting lists.

I recently asked the Minister to suspend the intimidation system until a proper way of verification can be established, rather than having the flimsy procedure that exists at present. When you consider a woman who feels under threat and individuals and families who are really living in fear, then those who use intimidation as a method

of jumping waiting lists, you see that it is not surprising that most people feel they are dealing with a broken system.

There are more than 40,000 people on waiting lists, with close to 20,000 declaring themselves homeless every year. Whilst that is a terrible statistic, there is also a hidden statistic: those who apply for homeless status and are refused. Thousands of young people are turned away because they are young and are perceived to be healthy. They are told that the Housing Executive has no responsibility for their housing situation and will not point them. They are advised to go into the private rented sector, which has many pitfalls for young vulnerable people. It is unregulated, and there is no system of tracking those young people, so many end up lying on friends' floors or sofa surfing.

I represent a constituency that has 4,077 people on the waiting list. Of those, 2,939 are in housing stress; 1,203 are single; 1,129 are classed as small families; 302 are older people; and 185 are large families, 88 of which are classified as large adults. Over the last year, there were 772 allocations, which in itself tells a story: the story of a lack of housing supply. The bottom line is the need to build more houses, and when they are built, to have a system in place to ensure a transparent selection scheme that is about fairness.

I ask you to support the motion. I ask the Minister to take the lead in the discussion and make the changes required to ensure that it be put in place.

Mr Bell: I think the whole House will endorse the import of the motion, which is that we take a fresh look at and look towards a replacement for the housing selection scheme. I welcome not only that the Minister is here today but that he and his Department have stated that they are open and are engaged in looking at what we can do to ensure that the housing selection scheme that we come forward with is fair and, as importantly, can be seen to be fair.

Assessing housing need is incredibly complex. We would all love to work on the basis that everybody who brings the information to us is honest and that the material we are dealing with can be equally weighed. Yet we have seen a trajectory from housing policy that started, it would seem, with the idea of, "Look, we will assess you from the time that you were first placed on the list, and that will be the criterion we then use for all subsequent future allocations", right through to what I believe was a better attempt to distil down within those lists where there was urgency and identified need and to come up with a process that was fair to everybody involved and defensible. There needs to be a fresh look at that to see what we can contribute through modernisation to ensure that fair transferable knowledge and policy can be made. I welcome that the Department is looking towards that.

We have all faced the problem in our constituency offices of intimidation. I share some of the issues that the honourable Member raised, particularly on confidentiality when people are discussing their housing situations. I have been — I am sure this is not unusual to any MLA in the House — in public bodies and with the Housing Executive, and, without wanting to, have been able to overhear people's conversations. Those involve people who are at their wits' end. In many cases, they are revealing very private details about their life. The particular case I am referring back to was about domestic violence. A very fair

point was made right at the start of the debate, which was this: whatever we do, we should look in that assessment at a more person-centred approach that would allow people dignity, particularly when they come often. We heard in earlier debates about the hassle and abuse that people take before they finally make the move. When they finally make the move, they are often at their wits' end. There is a need for people to be treated with dignity and respect within that.

4.00 pm

We have to look at the issue of intimidation. We have to be honest that it occurs, but equally we have to be very sharp to the fact that intimidation should not be used inappropriately to move somebody ahead on a list to somewhere where they otherwise could not be without — this is the key part — valid reason. We do not want to see the system being abused, and we can reflect on the good practice that we have. We have had two good reports looking at Northern Ireland and good practice in GB, and we should distil from those the important points so that we end up with a policy that reflects, not only what has occurred in the past but the knowledge that we have gained within that.

We also know the issues of homeless people who are making applications on the basis of unsuitable accommodation, and I would like the Department to look very seriously at the issue of unsuitable accommodation. I should have declared at the start, although it is on the register, that I am a landlord. I have visited homes in the private sector, made referrals and advised people about environmental health and different departments in councils. I have seen houses where wallpaper is coming off the walls and mould is growing round the windows. In such cases, people who are extremely vulnerable are forced to make a decision.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Bell: A new policy, freshly looked at, is in the best interests of everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allen: I thank the proposer of the motion for bringing this very important issue before us. Before I go into my comments, I declare an interest as a private landlord.

Like the last Member to speak, I have visited homes, and constituents have brought me in photographs of properties that are not fit for habitation. Those are not the type of properties that we want our constituents to be living in, so I urge that any review or reform of the housing selection scheme take into consideration the state of those homes and whether they are habitable.

There is no doubt that the current system is complex. Indeed, it is very difficult for many of our constituents who present to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to understand the process before them. It can be a difficult and traumatic process. The issue of confidentiality was raised, and I refer to a case no less than eight months ago when an individual was charged in a Magistrates' Court for a serious breach of confidentiality. Indeed, I have had ex- and current service personnel approach me over fears and concerns about the confidentiality of their information. We need to address that, not only when dealing with constituents but when dealing with our service community.

I urge the Minister to consider in any reform or review the military covenant and take that into consideration so that our service personnel veterans and their families are not disadvantaged by virtue of their service. I reiterate what my colleague Doug Beattie has said quite often: this is not about priority for service personnel veterans or their families; it is about making sure that disadvantage, where it exists, can be eradicated and understood by those who are implementing the policy.

I also urge the Minister to take into consideration post-separation. Since becoming an MLA in September 2015, 46% of the cases that my office has dealt with have been in relation to housing and housing repairs. Of those, a substantial number are in relation to post-separation, whereby no consideration is given to the other partner in the separation because they are not in receipt of child tax credits or child benefit, so they are not awarded any points for separation. We need to look at that, because those people do not receive the points that they should be entitled to and therefore do not progress up the points system and thus lie on it for a substantial time. Consequently, we have children who are being disadvantaged because they cannot spend time with their mothers or fathers outside the family home.

It is important to mention that there is no doubt that the most recent statistics that I could obtain before the debate are that in the region of 40,000 individuals are on the housing waiting list and that, of those, 22,000 are deemed to be in housing stress. That is a huge number, and we need to tackle that. The way to tackle that is to start to build the numbers of houses required to eradicate housing stress.

We also need to tackle hidden homelessness: the individuals who do not receive priority or full duty applicant points because they do not meet the current criteria. A lot of people sofa surf. It is not that they place a huge burden on family and friends but they are heavily reliant on them to put them up and help them in their time of difficulty. While alleviating housing need must and should remain central to social housing allocations, giving a wider range of people a chance of getting a social home might build healthier communities and support job creation, social mobility and shared futures.

Finally, when taking into consideration any review or reform of the social housing scheme, we need to take into consideration the social size criteria — the bedroom tax. How can we stand and penalise any of our constituents come 2021, post-mitigation, when we are not building adequate social housing to help people to downsize from three- and four-bedroom homes? If we are not able to help them to transition from those houses to smaller properties, which we are not building enough of, we cannot penalise them with the bedroom tax.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Member for bringing the motion to the House. There is no point in dressing it up: the housing selection scheme, and this is the crucial point, exacerbated by the shortage of housing, is broken, and it is time to replace it. Some might think this glib, but I got into politics to help people, and, without question, the vast bulk of my constituency work involves housing. To be honest, when I meet constituents who need help and they tell me that it is a housing issue, my heart sinks because I know that, no matter how hard I work on their case, I will not be able to deliver a timely solution for them. Some have already been living in housing stress for several years

before they even come to see me. Why is this the case? Put simply, it is because not enough social and affordable housing is being built, and the housing selection scheme is not fit for purpose. In fact, it is operating contrary to a number of, if not all, the system's founding principles: the principles of prioritisation based on greatest housing need, of fairness and equity, of openness, of consistency in application, of value for money and, certainly in my constituency, of a choice of where to live.

Those of us who deal with housing issues daily know that the system is being abused by some to the detriment of the many, many genuine people, not least, as Members pointed out, when it comes to intimidation, for example. Yes, there are genuine intimidation cases, and that must be recognised, and the people affected must be supported. However, we also know that there is a surge in the number of intimidation cases reported to the Housing Executive in the run-up to the release of a new social housing development. Why? Because under the current selection scheme, points mean prizes, and an intimidation case is awarded 200 points and guarantees escalation to the top end of the list. We also know of successful applications in terms of intimidation points from people with known track records when it comes to antisocial behaviour. The outworking of that system in the cases that I have referred to means that very problematic tenants are simply moved around and become concentrated in new developments, and a whole new cycle of problems begins.

The current assessment of intimidation cases that provides access to transfer for tenants with antisocial behaviour records requires urgent reform, as does the recognition of homelessness in temporary accommodation and the recognition given to unsuitable accommodation, not least for people with disabilities, who, in my view, are the biggest victims of the housing crisis. As Members have said here, there have been a number of reviews of the selection scheme. What we need now is for the Minister to introduce a series of recommendations for its replacement and for that to go out to public consultation.

I will end by saying that behind every statistic is a human story. Their fate is determined by the system, a system often established by a group of bureaucrats far removed from the experiences and lives of those it will dictate to and define. I will share a few examples from my constituency with you.

First, a father, fighting for custody of his child in the care of social services almost lost her because he did not have enough points to secure a suitable property with the extra bedroom that social services said was an essential prerequisite for full custody.

Secondly, a young family — a father, mother and their two children — woke up this morning, for the 608th morning, in a hostel that they were told was only ever going to be a temporary crisis intervention because, despite their best efforts, those of the hostel staff and mine, we cannot get them to anywhere near the level of points required to get a house in north Belfast, which is where their children go to school.

Thirdly, there is a disabled grandmother who has full custody of her three grandchildren — two of whom have disabilities — because her daughter, the children's mother, lost her life in tragic circumstances. At the very last minute, the grandmother was overtaken by intimidation cases and

lost out on a new-build property which was perfect for their physical, mental, emotional, social and educational needs.

This is the human impact of the current housing selection scheme and it is why the scheme can no longer continue to operate as it is. In reforming or replacing it, there must be proper transitional arrangements. Above all else, and I will end with this, unless thousands more houses are built — and unless bungalows are built and are no longer deemed to be not worth building because they are not profitable — any reform of the assessment scheme will be a meaningless paper exercise. If that is the case then all of us should be ashamed.

Mr Dickson: I rise to support the motion in the House this afternoon. Provision and allocation of housing has been, and remains, an extremely contested area in our society in Northern Ireland. The work of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and the common selection scheme ensures equality and fairness but we need to deliver better than this for our citizens in the future. We need to ensure that any scheme continues to deliver equity, fairness and transparency. None of these things should be underestimated in any allocation scheme. With 40,000 people waiting to gain access to housing, it is important to remember that many individuals and families have a variety of circumstances and reasons for needing to have appropriate housing. Others have given good examples of that in the Chamber this afternoon. People facing housing stress use the current common selection scheme because it is supposed to focus on securing housing for those in need. Yet, as referred to by colleagues, quite often it is those in need that the system fails; for example, people living in hostels, family circumstances and all of the other issues that come to the doorsteps of MLA constituency offices.

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

I accept that no system is perfect. However, we are all aware of incidents in which the current points-based system is, and can be, manipulated, often out of genuine desperation by those who see no prospect of being rehoused in a reasonable time frame. Sadly, all of us have to deal with victims of real intimidation, and survivors and victims of the past whose current housing need is completely unsuited to their deteriorating health and conditions. We need to ensure that any new system continues to protect those people without incentivising poor behaviour. Accordingly, a replacement must be sought for the housing selection scheme.

There are many recommendations in a joint University of Ulster and University of Cambridge paper on the matter but there are three areas, in particular, that should be of importance to the House and the Minister when considering a review of the housing selection scheme. First, moving away from the current points-based system would allow us to move to what is described as an active choice-based approach. This would allow people to see what is happening in the social housing market and to actively bid on properties that they are entitled to. On the surface, it would increase people's participation in the rehousing process and research has shown that this will increase success in obtaining a property.

4.15 pm

Mr F McCann: Would the Member give way?

Mr Dickson: I would.

Mr F McCann: I find the argument around choice-based lettings interesting. Most of the proposals are based on what was available in huge housing estates in England, where there were many hundreds of houses lying empty. People here are being offered choice-based lettings in areas where there are already difficulties, and, when houses are allocated, it adds to the difficulties that exist in those communities.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wholly respect what Mr McCann is saying, but, if he will allow me, I will make the point now rather than later that we need not only to review the scheme but, ultimately, to provide a much wider choice in the properties that are available, and that includes building them and providing them through other innovative schemes and methodologies. If we can widen the base, it will allow people to do what I genuinely believe they want to do, which is choose the appropriate house to live in rather than having it chosen for or thrust upon them, which is so often the problem that we face in Northern Ireland.

The current common selection scheme should not be the only option for people in Northern Ireland, and we need to invest much more heavily in co-ownership and encourage people to get involved in mutual exchanges. We should also look to develop other types of housing that will deliver for most people in need in our communities.

Minister Givan recently highlighted to the Committee the fact that £6.5 billion was needed over the next 30 years to address the upkeep of social housing in Northern Ireland. With the lack of certainty on funding, we must ensure that that is done and that we use all the best and most innovative ways of delivering housing, so that we can take the stress away from people's need to select the appropriate accommodation for them and their families and their lifestyle in terms of employment, age and medical or other conditions. It is important that we do that, recognising that we need to move towards a more integrated and open society that allows people to live where they want to live, in a society that is shared and open for everyone. The Alliance Party is happy to support the Minister in bringing forward appropriate recommendations for public discussion on housing selection.

Mr Stalford: I am happy to support the motion, and I thank Fra McCann for bringing it before the Assembly. It is timely that he has done so. The Committee for Communities has an over-representation of Belfast Assembly Members, and I think that one of the reasons for that is that all of the best people are on that Committee [*Laughter.*] No. One of the reasons is that, as a Belfast Assembly Member, I know, like my colleague from East Belfast Mr Andy Allen, that the huge majority of my time is spent dealing with housing issues. I am sure that that will be a common experience across the city, although I suspect that, for most Assembly Members, a huge chunk of their time is taken up by housing matters.

One important issue that has not yet been touched on in the debate is the way in which the present points system actively undermines the sustainability of communities. I say that because, time and again — I think particularly of communities such as Ballynafeigh — people come to me

seeking accommodation in the area where they were born and reared, where their family network is and where they have roots in the community, but, because of the blunt way in which the points system operates, they find that impossible. For example, if you are looking for something in Annadale, you will need 200 points-plus to be certain of getting something there. People who were born and reared in those communities oftentimes find it impossible to stay in them, and I hope that, as we reform the system, some recognition, at least, will be afforded to the desires of those who want to live in the area where they were born and reared in the points system.

Mention has been made — I agree — of the total lack of dignity that Housing Executive clients are left with when they go through the process of declaring themselves homeless. I have been in situations similar to those that have been described by colleagues around the Chamber. For the person who is representing them and going with them to that experience it is hard, but for the person who is on the receiving end of the process it is humiliating. They have to sit in front of a bureaucrat and pour out the most intimate details of their situation, and, often times, they feel as though they are not getting a response, they are not being spoken to like a human being and they are not being treated fairly or with dignity. Reform of that aspect of the housing allocation system would certainly be welcomed.

One of the issues that have already been mentioned — I think that it is important — is the abuse of the whole area of intimidation. As has been said, you will suddenly see a massive rise in claims of intimidation when housing is about to be released. The thing that has frustrated me many times is that often the people who are awarded the additional points for claiming intimidation are the selfsame people who made the lives of their neighbours and the communities in which they previously lived utterly wretched. People looking at the system —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: Yes, of course.

Mr F McCann: I will address that point. Many of those who claim intimidation put down as their area of choice somewhere 200 yards or half a mile down the road when they say that their life is in danger. It makes a nonsense of the whole thing.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: The Member is absolutely right. We have all seen that before. People who claim intimidation points are oftentimes those who, as I said, were making the lives of their neighbours wretched. They are so intimidated that, as he said, they want merely to move a few streets away or a couple of hundred yards from the place where they were supposedly being intimidated.

As public representatives, we have seen all of the many flaws that there are in the system. I welcome the fact that the Minister is here today, and I hope that he will be able to answer some of the questions that have been raised. One of the issues that I have had experience of as a constituency representative relates, in particular, to young men who want to live in the place where they were born. In vast swathes of my constituency, if you are a man under 30 with no dependants, you can forget about it because it is just not going to happen. We need to make some provision

and give some recognition to that group of people in order that they can stay in the place where they were born and reared.

We all know the reasons why the system was introduced — there is no need to rehash or rehearse them — but I believe that we have moved forward as a society to the point where meaningful reform of the system can be introduced that will command the support of every party in the House. I welcome the motion, and I thank — I nearly said, “I thank Councillor McCann” — Fra McCann for bringing it.

Mr McCartney: Mr Stalford talked about the Communities Committee being populated by people from Belfast: I am neither from Belfast nor am I a member of the Committee, but I assure you that housing is an item that concentrates the mind of every MLA in the Assembly. The motion today, tabled by Sinn Féin, is very straightforward, in that it asks the Minister to re-examine and take a fresh look at how we allocate houses in terms of need. That is very important.

When Fra McCann proposed the motion and when Nichola Mallon spoke, they talked about the core principles around the allocation of houses. I think that they were sound and remain sound. That is the idea of a system based on openness, transparency, following the need and allocating on the basis of need in a very equitable way.

I think that we should continue with that because, in the main, although aspects of the system are broken, other aspects remain sound. That is the basis on which we should go forward. We have seen some unanimity among Members. People feel that it is an appropriate time for a review, but we want it to be based on the system that is in place and on those principles as outlined.

Some Members have gone down other avenues such as areas of high demand and the need for more housing. That contributes to the debate. There is a need for more housing, particularly in areas of high demand. I live in Derry, which is, as the Minister is aware, an area of high demand. We have to find ways to address that.

Most people agree that the points system allows some openness. It is measurable, and people, if they wish, can measure it against the criteria set by the Housing Executive and other housing providers. Some Members touched on an important aspect of the review, which, I hope, the Minister will take forward: the way in which points are allocated for intimidation. What is described as “social” or “community” intimidation receives 20 points, whereas, if it is intimidation by paramilitaries or armed groups, it is 200 points. The point was well made: it is the living experience. If the Minister undertakes the review, I hope that he will take a particular look at the phenomenon of a new housing development reaching the allocation phase. Everybody involved in the system will tell you that there is a spike, particularly in the number of what are called “paramilitary” intimidations. We need to examine that to protect ourselves. Recently in Derry, over 300 houses were allocated over eight or nine months. A lot of people came away disappointed from that system because, on the cusp of allocation, they were told by everybody concerned that they had enough points, but they were later told that they had failed because someone got 200 points for intimidation. Those people go away feeling cheated by the system, and we have to move to eradicate that.

It is an appropriate time for the review and for the Minister to ensure that the idea of third parties verifying intimidation should also be examined. It is my belief and that of my party that, unless people report that intimidation directly to the PSNI, the allocation of points should be looked at or examined. No one now has any reason to go to third parties. That would put some pressure on the PSNI. PSNI personnel will sometimes tell you that threats of intimidation, particularly around housing, are not investigated as they should be. As someone said, it almost becomes a free way to get a house quickly. We have to remove that. I can say from my experience — I am sure that it is the experience of all Members — that the biggest disappointment and the thing that makes people most decry the system is that they feel that they are on the cusp of being awarded a house fairly, and then, all of a sudden, the house is taken away from them by a process that everybody agrees is flawed. That should be one of the main planks of the Minister’s review: to have a look at intimidation.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Member for proposing the motion. I am happy to speak on it, and I agree with the principle that any replacement of the housing selection scheme must be fair and more transparent than before. There are a number of grievous flaws with the current scheme. We all recognise that, and we listened to Members across the Chamber concurring with each other on the housing selection scheme. I will not use the main body of my speech to list all that is wrong, but it is important to highlight a few key areas, some of which have already been highlighted. That is how important it is to Members who deal with the issue daily. We have an exciting opportunity to improve on what has been a broken and, at times, deeply unfair system. I hope that the Minister intends to grasp his chance with both hands to amend that.

4.30 pm

First, it is important to recognise that young men have been proactively discriminated against in the housing selection scheme. In cases of marriage breakdown, the assumption was that the woman, in particular a mother who had majority custody of the children, was given priority, but that was only partially due to the lack of housing, which is still an issue, and it is a problem that has yet to be addressed. It is also understandable that the well-being of children was central to decision-making. However, the outflow of that was the creation of a significant class of young, vulnerable men who often had nowhere to go; we heard in the Chamber about couch surfing. They have become victims of crime, become involved in crime or, even worse, suffered poor mental health as a consequence of the system that is failing them. Any new scheme must take that into account and seek to address the imbalance.

Secondly, I wonder why it is not possible to have two lists for housing need: an A-list for those without specific considerations, and a B-list for those in more urgent special circumstances. My fellow Members across the Chamber will know that the overwhelming majority of housing cases we deal with are emergencies: people dealing with disabilities, victims of intimidation or those with large families. What that means is that those falling outside those critical criteria are often left in the shuffle. We need a system that addresses the seriousness of those in grave need of housing but which does not leave

all the others to languish in temporary accommodation because of the poor points system. Having two lists would be a step forward and allow for a better, joined-up approach in dealing with housing allocation. It would mean that those in the most urgent need would be automatically prioritised, but that those still in need but not in special categories would not simply be allowed to languish.

Finally, I would like to ask the Minister to consider how the Department deals with the issues of antisocial behaviour and intimidation. We have heard it all; we have heard all the Members talk about it. While charities do their best, I feel that it is unreasonable to rely so heavily on their assessments. I argue that, moving forward, that is a service that should rightfully be carried out by the Department; it should not be farmed out to charities. All allocations and assessments ought to be handled by a central unit in the Department. Furthermore, community consultation is an important part of many of the housing allocations. However, its use ought to be reformed. We heard about the intimidation and the bullets in the post. We heard about all the resettlement payments — well, we have not, actually. There are resettlement payments for those deemed to have been intimidated. It is maybe £600 to resettle into a new area, and whoever wrote and sent the bullet in the post gets a percentage of that. That is the deal that is cut across Northern Ireland. That is the corruption of the system, and we need to address that system urgently.

Additionally, with the B-list for those with special considerations, there is an obvious need for anonymous consultation to protect proposed tenants. There should not be a community veto on proposed tenants, and more must be done to proactively protect people moving into or living in areas away from paramilitary threats.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Mrs Palmer: We cannot allow paramilitaries to pick and choose who lives in which area. While due concern and care must be given to genuine threats, if we continue to allow so-called community vetoes, we are increasing the stranglehold that paramilitaries have over communities. The role of community representation in housing allocation must be urgently reviewed.

Mr McCrossan: I welcome the opportunity to participate in today's debate on an important issue that is plaguing my constituency of West Tyrone and many others, as we heard in the House today. It has left tens of thousands of vulnerable and helpless people across the North without adequate housing. The supply of a good standard of housing is a basic human need. When you come from a constituency that is rife with deprivation and unemployment, social housing is absolutely paramount for children to ensure that they have a roof over their head and that they get the best possible start in life.

That should be a priority for the Assembly in this new mandate.

Some would say that the provision of social housing is reaching crisis point. I strongly argue, having listened to the contributions from Members today, that we are at crisis point. I hope the Minister is listening intently to the concerns of Members. There has not been the necessary investment in new social homes, while the existing stock will soon become outdated and is coming into a state of

disrepair due to the delay in maintenance projects, which is ongoing.

As my colleagues and others highlighted, waiting lists for social housing are at an all-time high. I think it is important that we continue to repeat this number: 40,000 people are on waiting lists, Minister. Some 22,000 of those are in housing stress and 10,000 are deemed homeless. This House, through past decades, has completely failed many of these people, who are the most vulnerable, marginalised and helpless in our society. In this year's Budget and draft Programme for Government I do not see any meaningful attempt from this Government to address this issue.

The Minister stated in his opening statement to the Committee for Communities that his vision is to ensure that everyone can have access to good-quality housing at a reasonable cost and that he intends to have 1,600 social housing homes built across the North this year. I welcome that announcement, Minister, but West Tyrone alone suffered for years with few or no new housing builds. In fact, the waiting list in my constituency is, as articulated by others, at an all-time high, with 1,400 people on waiting lists and 600 deemed to be in housing stress. There has been little or no reduction in those numbers in the last 10 years. That is a reflection of the failure of the House to meet the most basic needs of our community.

It is of no surprise that, since 2011, West Tyrone has had the lowest number of new builds of any constituency across the North. That has left many individuals and families, especially those with young children or suffering disability, in a state of anxiety and depression. Given the chronic waiting lists for social housing and the rise of homelessness in Strabane, I am glad that the Minister has finally taken notice and is directing some resources to Strabane by committing to build 105 new social housing units in the area. But that is only the tip of the iceberg and will not resolve the impending crisis. I want a commitment that these proposed builds will happen on time, and I stress the need to the new Minister for further new build programmes across the entirety of the west Tyrone area.

Turning to the selection process, which has dominated today's debate, there are some serious issues with it, and I see them every day. As other Members highlighted, these are very real issues in our communities, and I will give you a few quick examples. I know of a mother of three children — she is very young and single — who went into a hostel. She has been there for eight months, and there is no sign of having her housed. She is in desperation and is living in very poor circumstances. I have been speaking to staff in the Housing Executive. Morale is at an all-time low. One lady said that she has worked for the Housing Executive since its foundation and has never seen things as bad.

In most instances, temporary emergency accommodation is provided, but that can be anywhere across Northern Ireland, which removes the family and friends' support structure that exists. Things are very, very bad. Just last week I attended the funeral of a gentleman in my constituency, but by the time I got back from his funeral, four people had called my office to ask whether there was any possibility they could get that house. "Desperation" is the term we must use.

I am aware that today is the starting point of the new Assembly term, and I am glad that this issue has been raised for debate. There exists serious need for new social

housing, and it is my view and the view of the SDLP that such need can be met only with new builds.

Mr Agnew: We need to build more houses, as has been pointed out. We have 40,000 people on our waiting list. Jonathan Bell was the first to raise honesty when people are seeking a home and trying to get as high as they can up the points list. The reality is that people will do what they need to do to get housed and to get appropriate and suitable accommodation for them and, in some cases, their families. When constituents come to us, we are, by necessity, complicit in the system that exists, in ensuring that they get the maximum points available to them.

I am certainly not suggesting that anyone in this House is encouraging people to get intimidated, but we ensure that they get the points that they are entitled to, and, hopefully, we do no more. There will be those who do not come to our offices and who are maybe not getting that support. It is those who are more proactive and know their way round the system who will get the extra points and support and get themselves up the housing list. The motion calls for a fair system. That is not a fair system.

We need to build new houses and more social houses. We need to suspend and review the right-to-buy scheme because we are chasing our tails. Whilst sales are down from the peak of the right-to-buy scheme, we are still selling off when we have insufficient stock.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Yes, I will give way.

Mr F McCann: At its height, 220,000 houses were under the Housing Executive's control; it is now 88,000. Whilst new build is crucial to rehousing people, and the policy of relets brings thousands of houses, as you continue to sell off your houses, that drives more and more people onto the housing waiting list.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention, and what he highlights is the slow privatisation of our public housing sector. We are allowing that to continue, and it is time to suspend to look at this again and decide if it is the way that we want to go forward.

We also need to bring our existing stock up to standard. We need to take as a basic principle that, where possible, we keep people in their homes. Currently, by and large, if somebody comes to us and says that their accommodation is unsuitable, we move them. There is obviously expense in that, and reference has been made to some of the grants for resettlement, but we just shift the problem. In some cases, we will put somebody else into that house who will later claim that it is unsuitable.

We need to make sure that our houses are suitable; that we make the adaptations and improve the standards. We need to do it at a strategic level across the board, but we need to do it, where possible, for those individuals, whether it is disability adaptations or just improving the quality of the building they are in.

The housing selection scheme itself needs to be reformed. We have conflated two connected but separate issues: housing need and personal circumstances. Until we separate those, see them as separate and come back to

the principle of housing need first, we will continue with the problems that Members have highlighted today.

We need to ensure, yes, that we put people in appropriate housing and assess their personal need and circumstances to ensure that we get that right, but the priority should be housing need, not personal circumstances. If we get back to that principle, we can address some of the issues that have been raised. However, the reality is that if there are not enough houses, there are not enough solutions. That has to be where we start: we have to build more social housing and invest in the social housing that we have to make sure that it is up to an adequate standard and that it accommodates lifelong living. We have to make sure that people who want to stay in their homes can stay in their homes and do not have to move because of damp, or because poor quality is affecting their health, or because they cannot afford to heat energy-inefficient homes.

If we do that, the importance of the scheme that we use to prioritise becomes less important. Get the first part right and the second part almost takes care of itself.

4.45 pm

Mr Carroll: I welcome the opportunity to discuss the motion, especially as it is on an issue of particular importance in my constituency of West Belfast, which has some of the largest waiting lists across the North and where it is not unusual for people to wait five years or a lot longer to be housed. This is an important topic that needs to be addressed. While there are people who, ideologically, want to break up the Housing Executive, we have to defend the principle of public housing and also ask whether we have the best system for allocating social housing. Obviously, the motion comes from one of the Executive parties. It is a bit cloak and dagger for Sinn Féin to say that we should get rid of the present system of allocation without indicating what the replacement system would be. The system is not perfect; I would not claim that it is. However, it would be helpful and useful to the debate if we could see the proposed replacement scheme in front of us.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will, yes.

Mr F McCann: It is interesting that you mention that, given that you know my record in housing in West Belfast over many years. It is a bit much for you to accuse the Executive parties, who have worked tirelessly over a long period to deal with housing issues in West Belfast. The system that you are talking about is broken. Everybody knows that it is broken. Something needs to be done to fix it. Do I have all the answers? No, I have not. I am sure that you do not have the answers either. We are talking about the Minister going away and coming back with a solution that allows us to deal with it, not coming off with —

Mr Carroll: I thank the Member for his point, but, as I said, there is no proposal in front of us.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I do not have any answers except to say that the Member has an extra minute.

Mr Carroll: It would be helpful and useful to have the alternative system of points allocation in front of us to better inform the debate. Every week, our constituency office is inundated with requests about housing, as I am

sure other Members' are. These are people who are in dire need of housing, people who are sleeping on sofas, people who are living in overcrowded housing, people who are living in accommodation that is covered with damp, and people who are living in accommodation that does not match their needs. We have to ask whether the current allocation scheme is working for these people. As mentioned previously, we also have to ask whether, under the current points allocation system, people with disabilities are getting the points that they are entitled to. What about people who have mental health issues? We know that, in some cases, people do get points for mental health issues, but it may be only a small allocation that does not reflect their daily life and the fact that mental health problems are a daily issue for them. Under a new system, mental health has to be central to the allocation of housing points.

The issue of asylum seekers and marginalised groups has to be looked at. Are they getting all the assistance that they need from the Housing Executive and other bodies? Any future selection system has to address the fact that an asylum seeker is not currently entitled to be on the social housing waiting list or receive housing benefit, even if an assessment would find them eligible.

The issue of housing in North Belfast also has to be tackled. It cannot be brushed under the carpet for another Assembly term. It is unacceptable that 75% of the people on the housing waiting list in North Belfast, and experiencing severe housing stress, are from the nationalist community.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not, no. The allocation does not reflect that inequality. We have witnessed examples in the past of the system being exploited by Ministers using sectarianism to provide more housing for one community, despite the need pointing in a completely different direction. This kind of practice has to come to an end. Allocation should be based on need, not on what is in the best interests of a Minister.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not, no. *[Interruption.]* The tone of the debate on intimidation has been quite worrying. To me, it comes across as an attempt to pit people against each other without pointing to the real issue that is being discussed already, which is the lack of social housing. It is concerning to hear talk of scrapping intimidation points. It is risky to scrap what can often be a safety net for people, as providing intimidation points is, without any concrete evidence provided this evening that the current system is not working. Safety measures need to exist for vulnerable people under any new system and, of course, there are absolutely real claims of intimidation. Indeed, I have had people approach me who cannot get points for intimidation despite being intimidated.

Of course, one way to ensure that people are not stuck on the housing waiting list for years, trying to do what they can to get points, is to ensure that there are enough properties to house everyone on the housing waiting list. That can be done through a crash housebuilding programme, employing thousands of brickies, plasterers, plumbers and other tradespeople. That will provide jobs as well as tens of thousands of homes for people who need

them. That is an important point, and, if the political will were there to do it, it could be done.

To conclude, I will support the motion because it is calling for a fairer and more transparent allocation system. However, that does not mean that People Before Profit will give blanket support to whatever the Executive will propose to replace it with. We will look at the proposed replacement when it comes to the Floor and decide then whether the replacement scheme is indeed fairer and more transparent before we decide to support any proposal.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude his remarks. Thank you.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I thank the Members who brought the motion today and thank Members for the contributions from right across the House. The motion gives me the opportunity to tell the Assembly about the important work being done by my Department in reviewing the housing selection scheme, which has been in operation, more or less unchanged, since 2000. Other Members raised issues and questions about the scheme in their contributions this afternoon, and I will seek to address some of those later.

Under a commitment made in the current housing strategy, a fundamental review of the allocation of social housing in Northern Ireland is being led by my Department. In the first phase of the review, academics were commissioned to deliver independent recommendations. These were published in late 2013, and we received more than 40 written responses to those recommendations. We are now in the second phase of the review. My Department is preparing proposals for public consultation. I will give those proposals my full consideration, and I expect to publish them later this year.

Let me assure the tablers of the motion and the rest of the Assembly that, when the proposals are published, they will find them to be supported by evidence and informed by independent research. I am committed to ensuring that the housing selection scheme is fair and transparent, and that commitment is reflected in the outcomes that I want to deliver as a result of changes to the scheme.

I am considering five outcomes at present, which I will outline for Members now. I believe that these outcomes will clearly address the fundamentals of the motion that we have before us today and ensure a fair and transparent system of assessing housing need. First, the outcome of any review must be to deliver a greater range of solutions to meet housing need. Secondly, there must be an improved system for the most vulnerable applicants. Thirdly, I want to see a more accurate waiting list that reflects the current housing circumstances of those on the list. Fourthly, and this is unquestionably the most important outcome, I want to see that those in greatest housing need receive priority. Finally, I want any changes to the scheme to enable better use of public resources by ensuring that the waiting list moves smoothly. That is my vision for a renewed housing selection scheme. While I will give the detailed proposals careful consideration before publishing them, I am glad of this opportunity to set out some key elements that have emerged during the research and evidence gathering phase.

The responses to the independent research recommendations have shown that, on the whole, the scheme has a high level of public support. There is strong

support for the existing principle of universal access to social housing in Northern Ireland. This principle means that any adult can apply for a home if they meet the eligibility criteria.

I expect any changes to the scheme to retain that principle of universal access.

Another area strongly supported in the first phase of the review was the recommendation that an independent, tenure-neutral housing advice service should be established. The service should offer advice to help households meet their housing need and find or keep suitable accommodation in any tenure. Clients could be assisted in applying for a social home, looking for private rented accommodation, getting support to stay where they are or considering co-ownership or full home ownership. There was broad support for this recommendation and there have been positive outcomes from a similar housing solutions pilot scheme that was run by the Housing Executive.

I am aware of some criticism of how the housing options model has developed elsewhere and the accusation that it is simply about improving the statistics. Let me be clear: that is not its purpose. I want to see a service being put in place that assists to put people into the housing solutions that are right for them. In many cases, people need help to stay in their own homes or to access housing in any tenure. The aim of a housing options service is that it is targeted to individuals' needs and delivers better outcomes for them. It is tailored and bespoke, as opposed to being a one-size-fits-all approach. My officials are therefore considering that proposal as part of the review.

Another area under consideration is the current status of intimidation points in the existing scheme. This is clearly an issue that many stakeholders have very strong views about. My concern is with the outcome. Do intimidation points help us to achieve the desired outcome, namely that those in highest housing need receive priority in the allocation of housing? I have to say that I am not convinced. Applicants with intimidation points do not, on average, appear to be housed quickly. When considering actual housing circumstances, applicants with intimidation points often have very few underlying housing issues, but, because of their intimidation, are housed ahead of other applicants who are often living in much poorer housing circumstances.

Let me give you an example. In the current scheme, a household that is intimidated will receive 200 points because of that intimidation, 70 points because the intimidation rendered them homeless and a further 20 points because they were threatened with violence. That is 290 points in total. Compare that with a household that is homeless because of domestic violence and is sharing with another family, simply because the people have nowhere else to go. In the current scheme, they will receive 70 points because they are homeless and 20 because they were threatened with violence. They will get 40 points because they have to share and possibly 20 points because they are also overcrowded. If they have been on the waiting list for a number of years, they might get up to 10 points because they have been waiting for that time. That is 160 points altogether in comparison with the 290 points received in the intimidation case. In some areas, families in serious housing need are waiting, and will continue to wait, precisely because households with

200-plus intimidation points always receive overriding priority.

I believe that it is time for change. As a society, we have moved on; our policies should also move on. I want to examine in detail whether removing intimidation points from the scheme would be beneficial for people in the worst physical housing circumstances. In exploring this option, I will also want to ensure that people who have to leave their homes because of intimidation will not be disadvantaged. Our legislation is clear in that they would continue to be recognised as being homeless and should be awarded points in the scheme on that basis, but they would be on a more equal footing with, for example, those who are homeless due to fire or flood or those who have experienced domestic violence. This is one of a number of proposals that the review has explored and that I am considering publishing for public consultation later this year.

Briefly, in a couple of minutes, let me address some of the points that some Members raised. Across the House, people mentioned that more resources are needed. I agree with that.

On the debate Mr Carroll raised about the attack on public housing, I suggest that those who want to get a house do not care whether it is provided through public or private finances. They want a house and that is what will drive me in taking forward proposals to try to provide for those who need help.

Mr Allen raised the issue of social size, or bedroom tax. It comes back to the point about there being a range of issues and not just dealing with this in isolation. We have the social housing reform agenda and there is a range of issues to address that will also impact how you can access funding to provide the housing needed. In the future, social size, or the bedroom tax, will obviously become an issue.

5.00 pm

The Assembly set aside £91 million as a result of the Fresh Start Agreement made by the two parties. That has ensured that people over the next period will not have to pay the bedroom tax, a taxation policy that his party joined with the Conservatives in campaigning for during a previous Westminster election, having agreed to take the whip if elected to Westminster, which then brought in the bedroom tax. The Member may therefore wish to reflect on the genesis of the bedroom tax and on what parties have acted to ensure that it does not have a detrimental impact.

Other Members raised a variety of issues, which I simply do not have the time to deal with now. I will seek to respond to them in writing. I want housing to be provided to people on the basis of need. Mr Carroll introduced a very sectarian element into the debate today, when he referred to "nationalist" housing in north Belfast. As a society, we hope to have left those days behind us. Let me give an assurance to the Member that we want to address people's needs not on the basis of their identity but because they need housing to be provided for them.

In conclusion, the housing selection scheme is complex by nature. I want to see a suite of proposals that can, taken together, deliver the outcomes that I have set out today. Those outcomes are based on assessing housing need accurately and efficiently and will therefore also support many of the proposed Programme for Government

outcomes and, indeed, the purpose of the programme's framework, which is to improve well-being for all.

I thank Members for their remarks.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Ms Carál Ní Chuilín to wind the debate and conclude.

Ms Ní Chuilín: It is rare for us at the start of an Assembly session, despite some comments, to achieve cross-party support for a motion, a motion that, by and large, everybody has a real sense of commitment to. Regardless of where you sit in this House, Fra McCann is recognised as — I was going to say “passionate” — passionate about housing. I will just get that across. Fra McCann has led the way in housing based on need for many decades. Back in his days on Belfast City Council and the Housing Executive, members of other political parties would contact Fra for advice, which he gave freely and with an open heart. That is the spirit in which we come to the motion. I also thank the research team; I believe that the research pack is very good. It will help some of the charities and other groups working on housing issues.

I will not go through systematically, as happens when winding on debates, what Members have said. Everybody remained for the debate and has heard all that. Certainly, there were some common themes. People are very passionate and concerned that the public housing element of the Housing Executive stays as it is. That is crucial. What we are saying is that the system, and the Minister confirmed that it has not been reviewed since 2000, is broken. It is not working.

I would like to clarify that some office staff have complained to us, as political representatives, that the conditions that they are working in when hearing confidential cases are not fit for purpose. Some of the staff hear very harrowing cases, and they are not happy with what they are hearing. Nor are they happy with the advice that they are giving people within the current system. They are looking to us to make changes. It is not their fault that we all walk into a crowded room and overhear one another's conversations. It is our fault that that is happening. We need to sort that out.

I also want to pick up on a few points. To be clear, when we are talking about need, we are talking about need. We are not talking about creed. Everybody said that. We are talking about objective need. The way in which objective need is measured will stand the test of time, particularly if there is a review of the situation. That too will be as part of a public consultation.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Briefly, Christopher.

Mr Stalford: I appreciate that. Does the Member agree that, throughout the debate, the only contribution that sought to divide the House in terms of orange and green came from our friend in the corner who is supposed to be neither, but red?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I like red; it is one of my favourite colours. I will take exception to one thing. This place is for politics; let us not girm about that.

What I do have an issue with is style over substance. I do not like popularism. I think that it is really cowardly, but pointing fingers on the basis of people having different political points of view is a wee bit silly as well. We need to

approach this from an evidence base. If people expected us to bring an alternative without consultation, that would have been a problem, and I think that Gerry is big enough to accept that. I know that he had to make a point for the sake of making a point, but it is not in Fra McCann's gift to throw out an alternative for housing without any public consultation. He is not a Minister — yet. That is a Minister's job and that of a Department. It is then our job to tear the consultation apart. Better still, if we are coming at it from a good position, it is our job to make the consultation better in order to make it better for the people whom we represent. What I have absolutely no tolerance for is people with assumptions and making points and then not backing them up with real evidence. I dare say that people will grow into doing that.

Not to be sectarian, but it is a fact that in my and Nichola Mallon's constituency, and William's, at times, you can have from 70% to 81.3% of people on the housing waiting list who are deemed to be nationalist. That is a challenge. What I will not accept, and what I do not think that any Member would accept, is that that is allowed to prevail because a lot of Catholics live in North Belfast. I am not saying that. What I will say, however, is that, if we are building houses and creating communities, that has to be done on the basis of need.

Mr Humphrey: I appreciate the Member giving way when the Member for West Belfast who gave incorrect figures to the House that misled it would not.

To put the record straight, I have to say that the figures across the four Housing Executive offices in North Belfast are not 75% or 80% but 50:50. The point that I will make is simply this: in supporting what the Minister said, where there is need, my party is absolutely committed to addressing that need, regardless of anyone's background, religion or creed.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am delighted to hear that. Everyone who is listening to the debate will hear that, and even people who want to lift Hansard will see that, but, William, it is not 50:50. I am going to disagree with you there, but, sure, we have disagreed from the day and hour that we looked at each other, so it is nothing new.

Apart from anything else, I am heartened by the fact that we are looking at an alternative, which will go out to consultation. I have not seen it yet, but I heard the Minister outline at least five or six outcomes that he wants to see in it. That is a good thing, but we are going to add to those.

We need to talk about intimidation, and everybody talked about it. Jenny outlined some of what is happening in her constituency. In ours, it is referred to as the “buy the bullet” scheme. Let us call it what it is. For anyone to claim that we are doing away with intimidation points, that is misleading and unfair. There are people who are intimidated. There are asylum seekers who are intimidated and refugees who are intimidated. There are women and men who are intimidated through domestic violence. There are lots of genuine reasons for people being intimidated, but we have all said that the system is being abused and that people are taking the hand. What happens when the system is abused is that the genuine people who endure the humiliation of living on sofas and in hostels, with their wee kids, huddled up and waiting for years, see somebody jumping the queue, and I do not think that anybody could stand over that. I have not heard anyone say anything

different. We all gave and heard examples that all sound so familiar to us.

Questions were asked about the availability of land on which to build houses. We need to build houses, and we need to build them where there is need. We also need to try to develop and support communities. I, along with many other people, have written to different Departments to try to find out about land availability. It is up to each of us to try to get that sorted out. I, like Fra and many others, have seen successive Ministers, with the best of intentions, make promises that, for different reasons, cannot be kept. We are in a different place, however. The acute housing problem, if not addressed, either through affordable housing or the availability of land on which to build, will lead to the slow privatisation of housing, because the private rented sector, although some of it is great — I am not a landlord — is becoming the alternative to social housing provision. There is a need for the private rented sector, but not as the alternative. The alternative is not working. That is not working, either. There are some very good landlords out there as well.

The challenge for us is to look at the replacement of the scheme. I am delighted that that replacement is going to come forward for public consultation. We have said that, when people are claiming to be intimidated or are alleging intimidation, it needs to be verified. You cannot ask somebody to intimidate you in a pub on a Sunday, walk round the corner, get your so-called threat on a Monday and have your points allocated the Monday after that. That is ridiculous, but that is what happens. When that happens, the humiliation of the families in the hostels continues. I defy anyone to stand over that system. It is not working. There was a need for a third-party scenario to exist years ago, but that has gone. If people get their cars broken into, they can go to the PSNI. If the PSNI, along with a charity or an independent, can verify it, so be it, but the days of people claiming intimidation through schemes, pals or whatever need to end. Our constituents are living in misery for years on end. I do not know anybody who could stand over that record.

I am delighted that we have received cross-party support for the motion. I commend Fra for bringing it forward, and I look forward to the consultation on the revised housing selection scheme.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to bring forward a replacement to the housing selection scheme that ensures a fairer and more transparent system of assessing housing need.

Adjourned at 5.12 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Plenary Meeting

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the First Minister and the deputy First Minister that they wish to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) plenary meeting.

Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): In compliance with section 52C(2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the twenty-second meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in plenary format, which was held in Dublin on Monday 4 July 2016.

The Executive Ministers who attended the meeting have agreed that I make this report on their behalf. Our delegation was led by the First Minister, Arlene Foster MLA, and me. In addition, the following Executive Ministers were in attendance: Minister Givan, Minister Hamilton, Minister Hazzard, Minister McIlveen, Minister Ó Muilleoir, Minister O'Neill, Minister Sugden, Minister Weir, junior Minister Fearon and junior Minister Ross. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD.

The meeting provided the new Governments in each jurisdiction with the opportunity to meet formally for the first time and exchange views on a wide range of issues of mutual interest and concern, especially in the light of the referendum decision to leave the EU.

In the opening discussion, Ministers welcomed the early opportunity for the new Governments to discuss the implications of the then recent referendum decision and for relations between both jurisdictions. At the meeting, the Council agreed that, as the mechanism for a UK exit from the EU becomes clearer, the implications of the referendum decision on North/South cooperation should be explored in detail under all sectors.

Ministers welcomed the development of the Irish Government's new Programme for a Partnership Government and the Executive's new draft Programme for Government framework and noted that building and maintaining relationships between each jurisdiction features in both documents.

At the meeting, the Health Ministers announced that they were jointly opening the cardiac catheterisation lab in Our Lady's Children's Hospital in Crumlin later that day. They also announced the way forward for the all-island congenital heart disease network. They said that they

looked forward to working together to build on the good progress made by their Departments and committed to further scope opportunities for all-island cooperation in health and social care.

The focus of the meeting was very much on financial and EU matters, and the Council had a detailed discussion on the potential impact of the UK referendum result to leave the EU. In order to optimise joint planning and engagement on key issues arising from the referendum result, the NSMC agreed to work together to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that the benefits of North/South cooperation are fully recognised in any new arrangements that emerge as regards the UK's future relationship with the European Union. It also noted that there are a number of priority areas where implications arise, particularly the economy and trade; Northern and British and Irish relations; the common travel area; and the EU.

It agreed that a full audit will be undertaken in all sectors to identify the possible impacts, risks, opportunities and contingencies arising in the phases preceding and following the UK's withdrawal from the EU. It agreed that this work will in turn be submitted to ministerial sectoral meetings for consideration as to the strategic and cross-cutting issues arising and that final priorities will be agreed by the next NSMC plenary meeting for the pre-negotiation and negotiation phases. It agreed that a further discussion on the implications of the referendum result will take place at the next NSMC plenary meeting and that the NSMC can provide a useful forum for ongoing discussion on relevant matters.

It reiterated the joint commitment of the Irish Government and the Executive to the successful implementation of the Peace and INTERREG programmes and agreed that the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and the Executive's Finance Minister will consider the issue of securing European regional development fund (ERDF) funding for Peace and INTERREG, including through engagement with the European Commission. It agreed that the frequency of the briefings on relevant EU matters provided by the Irish Government for senior officials should increase and include consideration of issues arising from the referendum decision. It agreed that the Irish Permanent Representation in Brussels and the Executive Office in Brussels will continue and intensify their close working relationship and noted and welcomed David Cameron's clear commitment to engagement of the Executive in the negotiating process with the European Union. Ministers also provided updates on economic conditions, North and South.

The Council noted the continued commitment of the Irish Government and the Executive in the Fresh Start

Agreement to investing in infrastructure, which will support cooperation and unlock the full potential of the economies of both jurisdictions. Ministers noted the progress report by senior officials from relevant Departments in both jurisdictions addressing the Fresh Start commitments, including work on the A5 western transport corridor, noting that the A5 is on schedule to start in 2017, and the review of options for the Ulster canal and the Narrow Water bridge. Ministers noted that the group of senior officials will continue to meet regularly to maintain a strategic overview of the projects and commitments set out in Fresh Start and to explore funding opportunities for economic and infrastructure investment. The Council agreed that a further update on the Fresh Start section E commitments will be brought to the next NSMC plenary meeting.

The next item on the agenda was the north-west gateway initiative, and Ministers noted the continued engagement between officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and the Executive Office, with regional stakeholders regarding the direction and priorities for the north-west region. Ministers agreed that senior officials from relevant Departments in both jurisdictions should meet with the two councils as part of the framework and noted the continuing commitment to a meeting of Ministers from both jurisdictions to take place in the north-west. Ministers noted the additional Fresh Start commitment to support the north-west gateway initiative through the establishment of a north-west development fund and welcomed the contribution by the Irish Government of €2.5 million and the commitment of match funding from our Executive. Finally, Ministers agreed that the next plenary meeting would be held in Armagh in November.

Mr Nesbitt: The Irish Government's commitments through Fresh Start section C are explicitly linked to their capital plan for 2016-21 called 'Building on Recovery'. This makes no fewer than 45 references to the benefits of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and, yet, for many years, the Minister's party has been implacably opposed to PPPs, calling them "folly" and saying that "they just do not work". There are dozens of such quotes. How does the Minister square that circle?

Mr McGuinness: The Member is quoting the Irish Government's position on all these matters. As we go forward, we do so on the basis that the different projects we will be engaged in will be cost-effective. To do so with a closed mind would be folly of the worst kind. At the same time, this does not commit us to anything that would, in any way, undermine the quite reasonable position that we, as a party, have taken. Remember that when I am at the NSMC, I am not there representing Sinn Féin. I am there representing the Executive alongside the First Minister. In the course of our engagements with the Irish Government, and, inevitably, with whatever projects we commit ourselves to, there will always have to be some sort of compromise between us on how we can get projects on the road. It would have been the same with you had you been our First Minister.

Mr Stalford: A lot of the predictions made regarding the economic impact of the decision on Brexit have come to nothing. A recession is defined as being two consecutive quarters of negative growth. Someone in the Chamber said that we had been plunged into a recession and that is clearly not the case. In maximising the opportunities presented by the decision, will the deputy First Minister

outline to the House what message the Executive will be conveying to overseas investors about Northern Ireland being a good place to do business?

Mr McGuinness: I know that the Member is new but the questions we are answering here are about the plenary session of the North/South Ministerial Council that took place in Dublin. This question is outside that format but it is a reasonable one. We, as a political party, with the DUP in the new governmental arrangements, have a duty and a responsibility to work together to make this place work, and we are absolutely dedicated and committed to doing that. My track record — for example, working with the late Rev Ian Paisley and Peter Robinson in attracting foreign direct investment — is second to none. That work will continue. The First Minister and I will continue to do our jobs to bear down on unacceptable unemployment levels, and we have had some success in that in recent times. We will continue our engagement with North America in particular.

The Member talked about us not having had a recession and that it is not doom and gloom at the moment. Obviously, in the context of Brexit, it is early days. We do not know what the outcome of the negotiations will hold for us as a region. The First Minister and I, even though we are on different sides of the debate and the argument on Brexit, still have a responsibility to lead the Executive, deliver first-class public services, provide employment and ensure that we are giving leadership to the people we represent. That is important and I am absolutely determined to do it.

Mr McGuigan: Will the deputy First Minister provide an update on elements of the Fresh Start Agreement relating to the North/South Ministerial Council?

Mr McGuinness: The Irish Government were very much involved in the Fresh Start negotiations from a distance and made very important commitments during the course of those negotiations. The successful implementation of the Fresh Start Agreement is vital and they have a role to play in that. It laid out an agreed way forward and we must work hard to ensure that it is fully delivered.

I am particularly pleased that work on the A5 remains on target and that, subject to completion of all the statutory processes, the project could start next year. Narrow Water bridge is an important project in the Newry and Louth areas and there is real desire in those areas for the bridge. I have met numerous delegations to discuss the bridge and I hope that we can find the funds and a way to make the plans a reality.

I also think the commitment to the north-west is vital. We are all aware that the region suffers due to a legacy of underinvestment and the lack of connectivity between the area and Belfast or Dublin. Senior officials are taking forward work to consider what impact, if any, Brexit may have on the delivery of these projects and others that are specified in the Fresh Start Agreement. All the conversations thus far clearly indicate that the Irish Government are as exercised as we are to ensure that we fully implement the Fresh Start Agreement, including the commitments that they have made.

10.45 am

Mr McPhillips: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement and for providing an update on the latest meeting and the implications of the vote to leave the

European Union that were centre stage at the discussion. Can he outline what discussions there have been on setting up an all-Ireland forum to consider the implications of Brexit, and does he agree that no single party in the Chamber has the power to veto the establishment of such a forum?

Mr McGuinness: It has been the subject of some public discussion recently, and I understand that, while the Taoiseach was at a political event in England at the weekend, he clearly indicated that he intends to take the process forward. My sense is that it will happen with an open door for everybody entitled to be there — all the relevant stakeholders and political parties will be invited to attend. It is also the right of any political party not to attend if it so wishes; we cannot force people to do what they are not willing to do. We wait with interest to see the establishment of the forum. My party is very much in favour of it, and such a forum could be held without injuring anybody's political allegiance.

Mr Dickson: I thank the deputy First Minister for bringing the report to us. What does intensifying their close working relationship entail with regard to the Irish Permanent Representation and the Northern Ireland Executive office in Brussels? How long do you expect that intensive relationship to last, and will the Northern Ireland Executive maintain its office in Brussels after the UK leaves the European Union — if it ever does?

Mr McGuinness: The Member's last comment is as relevant as anything else that has been said in the Chamber today. Who knows what lies ahead with these matters? We have committed to intensifying our relationships with the Irish Government and the Executive office in Brussels. That is the common sense thing to do, given the huge challenge that will face us all, if article 50 is triggered at some stage early in the new year. When the First Minister and I met with Theresa May, she made it absolutely clear that she was not going to trigger article 50 this year but that she would do so early next year because she would not allow others to accuse her of being slow to move forward with Brexit, whatever Brexit means; many of us wonder that. It is very important that the Executive office in Brussels is utilised to the full and that our engagement through it, with the Irish Government and Brussels, is intensified.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the deputy First Minister for the statement this morning. He referred to welcoming the Executive's commitment to engagement in the UK's negotiations with the European Union. How does he see this engagement with Her Majesty's Government progressing, following the recent visit by David Davis?

Mr McGuinness: In the discussions that we had with David Cameron and Theresa May, they made it absolutely clear that we would be involved. Obviously, the mechanism of how we do that has yet to be agreed, but there are a number of options, including the Joint Ministerial Committee in London, which the First Minister and I attend with the First Minister of Wales, the First Minister of Scotland and, on occasion, the British Prime Minister. That is one option; there are others. It has yet to be negotiated with the British Government, and that is something that the First Minister and I will turn our attention to. It is obvious that others in Scotland and Wales are exercised about this as well.

To be honest, when Peter Robinson and I attended previous meetings of the Joint Ministerial Committee as First Minister and deputy First Minister, we, along with Wales and Scotland, were underwhelmed by the seriousness with which the British Government took the views expressed by the devolved Administrations. If that is to be the mechanism, there will have to be a fundamental change of attitude by the British Government, and we will test that in the time ahead.

Mr Boylan: Cuirim fáilte roimh ráiteas an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement. I will take his advice and stick to the statement. I refer to paragraph 9 on health: will the Minister give us a wee update on cross-border cooperation in health?

Mr McGuinness: As I said in my opening statement, the meeting dealt with health in a positive and important way. In the aftermath of the meeting, Health Ministers from the North and South went off to be involved in the initiatives that they have agreed on children's health and on heart conditions, North and South, through joint working processes. The fact that they committed themselves during the conversations that they were involved in to further exploration of how we can, on an all-island basis, improve our people's health is very important.

We all know that great work has been done at the South West Acute Hospital, with patients from Cavan and Monaghan being treated there, and that there will be a very important initiative in the north-west at Altnagelvin Area Hospital when the new radiotherapy unit opens in a few weeks' time for the treatment of people from the north-west — from Derry, Tyrone, north Sligo and Donegal. These are all common-sense, important initiatives that can quite easily be undertaken without endangering anybody's political allegiances.

The sensible view taken by our Health Minister and previous Health Ministers, including DUP Ministers, speaks volumes for their very open-minded approach to ensuring that we work in a common-sense way not only to lower costs but, in a very effective way, to deliver a first-class health service for the people whom we represent.

Mr Logan: I thank the deputy First Minister for his statement. Was a single electricity market mentioned?

Mr McGuinness: Absolutely. The issue of the single electricity market is important for all of us, and it is a high-level commitment. There are processes being undertaken, North and South, in relation to the statutory obligations of fulfilling whatever conditions are required to ensure that that goes forward. That represents a huge challenge to all of us, particularly when we hear people in the manufacturing sector talk about the high costs that they have incurred as a result of the failure to put in place the single electricity market. We recognise that they are clearly working with the view that those costs could be radically reduced against the backdrop of a more effective way of delivering electricity. That represents another big challenge for us in the time ahead, and the Executive and the Irish Government are looking closely at it.

Mr Aiken: I thank the deputy First Minister for his words. When communicating with Ministers during the North/South Ministerial Council meeting, were you able to express some of the differing perspectives that the Northern Ireland Executive have to the Irish Government?

When you were doing that, what was the response from the Irish Government?

Mr McGuinness: The Irish Government are as experienced politicians as we are in the North, and they know that, during the referendum debate, the DUP and Sinn Féin were on different sides of the argument. There was complete understanding on the Irish Government Ministers' part that that was the case. As in everything else, when we find ourselves in the situation that we are in at the moment, with the real prospect that article 50 of the Lisbon treaty will be triggered and there will be a very intensive negotiation, we have to work in a common-sense, practical way to ensure that we defend the interests of the people we represent, North and South. Brexit obviously has profound implications for the South, and they have expressed that publicly. I believe it has profound implications for us in the North, but we all have to work together.

I think a clear signal of our ability to work together is the joint letter that the First Minister and I sent to Theresa May identifying areas of real concern to us. I am sure that those concerns are shared by the Irish Government. It is important that we have the Irish Government as an ally in relation to the arguments that we intend to make in the time ahead, whether it be around the issue of funding or the issue of a hard border. We have identified those issues in the letter that we sent to Theresa May. I think that clearly indicates to the Irish Government that we are working together to make the best of what is a very difficult situation for all of us.

Mr Allister: Since the essential burden of the meeting related to Brexit, may I ask for clarity on a central issue? Do the deputy First Minister and his half of the Executive accept the reality that the United Kingdom, including all of its parts, is leaving the EU? Without that unequivocal acceptance, the supposed agreed approach in the joint letter to the Prime Minister is an empty sham. Can the deputy First Minister, without evasion, answer that simple question: do he and his Ministers, whether they like it or not, accept that we are leaving the EU?

Mr McGuinness: I am not here to speak on behalf of one half of the Executive; I am here to speak on behalf of the Executive and the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister. I am aware of the outcome of the Brexit vote. I know that overwhelmingly in England they voted to leave. I know that in Scotland they voted to remain. I know that, here, the people of the North voted to remain. That represents a real issue that the British Government and the European Union have to take under consideration. I am for staying in Europe, but, if the British Government trigger article 50 and are then involved in a negotiation to exit Europe, I as a responsible politician have a duty and a responsibility to work with the First Minister and the other Ministers in the Executive to make the best fist of what we can in relation to defending the interests of the people whom we represent.

British-Irish Council: 22 July 2016

Mrs Foster (The First Minister): Mr Speaker, in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following statement on the 27th summit meeting of the British-Irish Council, which took place in Cathays Park, Cardiff, on 22 July 2016. The deputy First Minister and I attended the summit, and he has agreed that I make this statement also on his behalf.

The British-Irish Council was established as part of the multi-party agreement reached in Belfast on 10 April 1998. The Council plays a valuable role in developing and furthering links between its eight member Administrations. It provides a dynamic forum for exchange of information and collaboration on policies of mutual interest, and it fosters positive, practical relationships across these islands.

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

This was an extraordinary summit of the Council, hosted by the Welsh Government and convened specifically to consider the outcome of the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union. The heads of delegations were welcomed by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The Irish Government delegation was led by the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD. The UK Government delegation was jointly led by the Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and the Rt Hon Alun Cairns, Secretary of State for Wales.

The Scottish Government delegation was led by the First Minister, the Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon. The Isle of Man Government were led by the Chief Minister, the Hon Allan Bell MHK. The Government of Jersey were led by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst, and the Government of Guernsey were led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Gavin St Pier. A full list of delegation members is attached to the copy of this statement provided to Members.

11.00 am

Council members offered their condolences to the people of France following the terrorist attacks in Nice in July and to victims of conflicts around the world.

Member Administrations discussed the result of the referendum and reflected on the implications for each individual BIC member Administration, including those Administrations that are not part of the European Union, as well as for the Council as a whole. The Council noted that implications arise in a number of priority areas, in particular, the economy and trade, the common travel area, relations with the European Union and the status of all citizens affected by the change. It further noted that the process for implementing the referendum outcome would become clearer in the coming months.

During discussions, Ministers collectively reaffirmed the importance of the Council as a key institution of the 1998 agreement and an important and unique forum to share views, enhance cooperation and strengthen relationships amongst all member Administrations at this time. They reiterated their commitment to facilitating harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships among the people of these islands. It was agreed that the Council should be fully utilised to ensure that all member Administrations work together to this end. The Council also agreed that an update on developments following the referendum result,

including for the BIC work sectors, would be facilitated at the next BIC summit.

As a final item of business, the Council noted that the next BIC summit would be hosted again by Wales in November 2016.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. With regard to Ministers collectively reaffirming the importance of the Council as a key institution of the 1998 agreement, what other elements of the 1998 Belfast/Good Friday Agreement does the Minister now affirm?

Mrs Foster: That question is not relevant to what happened at the meeting in Wales. That meeting was formatted to discuss the outcome of the European referendum in the United Kingdom. Part of the benefit of meeting in that format is that we get to speak to those member Administrations that are not members of the European Union and to learn from their experiences in how they deal with members of the European Union. I found it very interesting to hear from Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man as to how their protocol 3 rights are dealt with in Europe and how they manage to deal with other issues on which we have been able to deal directly with Europe because of our membership of the European Union. However, they have managed very well outside the European Union. That is of interest to me, and I intend to have further discussions about that with Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. It was a very useful meeting, and that, of course, is what the statement is about.

Mr Stalford: Will the First Minister outline for the House just how important she considers the role of Executive Ministers to be in ensuring and maintaining confidence in Northern Ireland as a destination for investors?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. It amazed me slightly that some Members of the House — not just Ministers — took the opportunity after the European Union referendum to talk down Northern Ireland as a destination for foreign direct investment. They should hang their heads in shame, frankly. For them to call themselves unionists is quite beyond me.

As an Administration, we will continue to seek further foreign direct investment because our proposition has not changed. Our talent, our young people, the skills that we have, the fact that we have a low-cost base to do business out of and have attracted so much foreign direct investment over this past period stands us all in good stead. I look forward to working alongside my Executive colleagues to present a positive front for the future of Northern Ireland and what we can do for all our people.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she expand on the key concerns expressed by the various Administrations on the Brexit outcome?

Mrs Foster: Those are concerns that we share as well. Just because I campaigned for Brexit does not mean that there will not be short-term issues that need to be dealt with. However, in the medium to long term, I believe that it will be right for the United Kingdom to be outside the European Union. That does not mean to say that we do not have to deal with short-term challenges. Of course, we set out those short-term challenges in our letter to our Prime Minister on 10 August, and those challenges are shared across the Administrations. Of course, we will have the additional challenge of having a border with the European

Union once we leave Europe, and we intend to make sure that that does not present an impediment to trade and to people wanting to visit Northern Ireland in the future. I look forward to continuing our discussions with colleagues in Westminster. Of course, it is for the United Kingdom Government to negotiate the terms of our exit from the European Union, but as the deputy First Minister said in relation to the previous statement, we intend to have a full and active voice at the table to get what is best for all the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the First Minister for her statement. Coming from the border constituency of Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I know that there are genuine concerns that there will be a hard border following the vote to leave the European Union, which will negatively impact trade, investment and travel arrangements. In light of that, David Davis, the Minister responsible for negotiating the exit from the EU, has said that they do not have a solution for the border. How confident is the First Minister that there will not be a hard border, considering the ambiguity that currently exists in Westminster?

Mrs Foster: I remind the Member that there was never a hard border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Those of us who were the subject of a terrorist campaign wished for a hard border at times, however, that did not occur. If he is talking about the military presence in the border area, that was completely different from what may be needed in the future for customs. The reason it was there was to deal with a terrorist threat at that particular time, and there will be no return to that because of what we have achieved here in this place to present a positive and peaceful Northern Ireland.

We can negotiate with our colleagues in the European Union about what is best for both sides of the border. As I said, we will continue to work with our colleagues not only in the United Kingdom Government but in the Republic of Ireland Government so that we can work out what is best for each side of the border. That, to me, is the best way to move forward in negotiations. Of course, negotiations will take some time; they may well be protracted, but we should not be lacking in ambition for what we want to see for Northern Ireland moving forward. People who continually look for challenges and problems, instead of looking for opportunities and ambition, really do depress me at times. It is about time people had ambition for the place they represent, instead of talking it down.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, First Minister. Given that one of the ambitions of many through the Good Friday Agreement was to secure additional citizenship rights for people in Northern Ireland, and given our unique citizenship position in Northern Ireland, what efforts will you make, along with the deputy First Minister, to protect those rights as negotiations continue towards Brexit?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As he well knows, the Belfast Agreement of 10 April 1998 is an international agreement that was signed by two sovereign Governments: the United Kingdom Government; and the Republic of Ireland Government. Therefore, the contents of the Belfast Agreement, though some of us would like to change some elements in it, still remain in place.

Mr Logan: What was the First Minister's reaction to suggestions by some that the joint Executive letter to the

Prime Minister was, in some way, a softening of this party's position on the exit from the EU?

Mrs Foster: I have heard many things since the European Union referendum but that was probably the most bizarre. It ranked up there with the time that I was with the deputy First Minister at the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister before the election and was accused of being a "Remainer", which was bizarre in the extreme, however, these things come to us all.

Look, there will be short-term challenges ahead. I am not going to shy away from those, but I fundamentally believe that the medium- and longer-term interests of this part of the United Kingdom and all of the United Kingdom are best served outside of the European Union. To those who do not think that it is going to happen and who say, "What does 'Brexit means Brexit' mean?", I say that it means that we are leaving the European Union institutions. It does not mean that we are leaving Europe. It gives us a huge opportunity to move forward as a country.

Mr Irwin: I thank the First Minister for her statement. Following the referendum result, what message will she be offering to potential overseas investors in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I will be saying to potential first-time investors in Northern Ireland that we have a very good proposition for them here. The deputy First Minister and I have been pleased to make some announcements since the Assembly election and the European Union referendum took place about people coming to and investing in Northern Ireland. There is much more that we can do around all of that. Indeed, he and I intend to go to China towards the end of this year to talk about trade but also to look for investment opportunities from China into Northern Ireland. We will continue to support the work of our Economy Minister. I am very passionate about wanting to create more and better jobs. It was part of the five-point plan that I stood on in the Assembly elections and is something that I will continue to push vociferously.

Mr Aiken: I congratulate the First Minister very much for the use of the word "ambition". It is vital that we have ambition for Northern Ireland going forward. I would ask her to read our fantastic document, 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU' — [*Laughter.*] — which very clearly looks towards ambition, as we see ourselves becoming a gateway to Europe. She needs to look very carefully at some of the key ideas in it.

When you were having discussions with the First Minister of Scotland in particular, did you consider the idea of setting up a Northern Ireland council, similar to the Scottish Standing Council on Europe that has been set up to promote the interests of Scotland, as we move to deal with issues to do with the EU? Would that not be a good opportunity for Northern Ireland to make its case very strongly?

Mrs Foster: I intend to continue the work that we have already started regarding the EU. The deputy First Minister and I asked Invest Northern Ireland to set up a stakeholder group, which has already met on a number of occasions, to speak directly to business about where concerns and opportunities lie when it comes to our exit from the European Union. That is something that we did very quickly.

I will not say that I have had the benefit of reading it, but I have read the document that was published to much fanfare yesterday. I am not sure whether it is the official Ulster Unionist document, the official Opposition document or the continuity Ulster Unionist document. I do have the document, however, which is entirely uncosted — no surprise there. It is also a document that brings forward propositions that are some six to 10 years old. A Northern Ireland-wide enterprise zone was first mooted by his party when it stood under the umbrella of UCUNF back in 2010. However, at that particular — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order.

Mrs Foster: It is very difficult to take some of this back, is it not? It is very difficult to take back the fact that, since 2010, there has not been one suggestion as to how we would progress with that enterprise zone for the whole of Northern Ireland, even though it was first talked about then.

We also have a tripling of investment for infrastructure, despite the fact that the deputy First Minister and I were roundly criticised for borrowing money. We were asked where that money was coming from and whether we were borrowing it. There seems to be very little detail on that issue.

There is, of course, the talk of an awakening of constitutional arguments around Irish and Scottish nationalism. I think that we can say that that was dealt with last week. I still find it bizarre that a unionist party would seek to talk about those issues.

11.15 am

Then, bizarrely, it talks about some "pre-Brexit legacy project" for:

"people born in the north east of this island."

What is that about? Does it exclude me? I live in the south-west of Northern Ireland; this talks about the north-east of the island. In any event, I am sure that other Members will want to look in great detail at the Ulster Unionist document.

The thing about the Ulster Unionist Party is that it opted out. It opted out of the Executive, and it opted out of helping to make decisions for the people of Northern Ireland. Therefore, it is left to the Executive and to the deputy First Minister and me to present the best way possible for the people of Northern Ireland, and we will do that.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the First Minister for the statement this morning. Will she tell us how she considers the Northern Ireland economy to be performing in the aftermath of the referendum?

Mrs Foster: Despite all the predictions, I think that the economy has been presenting itself well. Of course, we are assisted in that, particularly those who want to export, with the lowering of the pound, which was getting to an overvalued stage. As I say, we will continue to look at the talent of our young people as our best natural resource, and we will talk about the fact that this is a good place to do business in terms of costs for businesses. Then, of course, we look forward to the proposition of lowering our rate of corporation tax in April 2018, when we will have the talent, the cost and the tax offering. We have a very strong proposition, and we will continue to sell it.

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. The summit notes refer to the status of EU citizens, which was raised in the letter that your colleague mentioned. How does the First Minister envisage the movement of labour if we are outside the European Union and the status of EU citizens who are not from this island?

Mrs Foster: Of course, that will be a matter for negotiation between the Prime Minister and the European Union. All four freedoms will have to be looked at, including the movement of people. The Prime Minister has been very clear that she has listened to the vote and to the message that it gave about the free movement of people. Therefore, I expect that she will have something to say about that.

In negotiations, one does not show one's hand because one ends up in the position where everyone knows that that is the bottom line. I presume that this is something that we will have very close negotiations on, particularly at our joint meetings with the United Kingdom Government. We look forward to those discussions because we here in Northern Ireland value the contribution made by those who have come to Northern Ireland to work. I know that that is true for many companies across Northern Ireland. We will continue to value their contribution as we enter this period of negotiation between our own Government and the members of the European Union.

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge that the First Minister recognises that there are short-term challenges arising from the Brexit decision. She may want to review the Hansard record from yesterday and the comments of her Economy Minister, who appeared to bury his head in the sand about the short-term challenges.

The First Minister said in an earlier reply that the Northern Ireland Executive wanted a "full and active voice" for all of Northern Ireland in the Brexit negotiations. Of course, the deputy First Minister said in reply to an earlier question that you have not heard from London yet about what the role of the Northern Ireland Government might be in those negotiations. Can you advise the Chamber of, or lodge in the Library, what proposals you have put to London so that the Northern Ireland Executive are not marginalised in the London negotiations with Europe on Brexit?

Mrs Foster: Let me say to the Member that I was here for the deputy First Minister's answers, and that is not what he said about our negotiations with London. The Prime Minister visited here in the last week of July, and we were very clear with her that not only would we have a voice in what happens in the European Union exit but that it would be a direct voice at the table so that no unintended consequences could occur for the people of Northern Ireland in the leaving of the European Union.

We will have a direct voice at the table. Whether that is through a mechanism called the Joint Ministerial Committee or some other mechanism, we, jointly, are very clear that it will be a direct voice because we feel strongly that, to represent the people of Northern Ireland at the table, we must be there and we must be heard.

Mr Allister: Does the First Minister accept that, to have a positive impact on the national negotiations on Brexit — I stress that they are national negotiations — it is a prerequisite that the Executive are all pulling in the one direction on the issue and that this voice at the table cannot serve Northern Ireland if one part of it is saying out of one side of the mouth, "We agree with Brexit", and

the other part is saying, "We do not accept Brexit", such as we had yesterday from the Finance Minister and in the equivocation of the deputy First Minister this morning? Will the effort to get a positive outcome for Northern Ireland not be impeded unless the Executive are all pulling in the same direction and accepting the reality that we are leaving the EU?

Mrs Foster: The reality is absolutely that we are leaving the EU. Already this morning, we have heard the suggestion, not from the party opposite but from other parties, that article 50 will not be triggered. That is certainly not my sense when I speak to David Davis and Liam Fox. I know that my colleague had a meeting with Greg Clark when he came to Northern Ireland. It is certainly not my sense of where the Prime Minister is in relation to these matters. We are leaving the European Union. It is, therefore, imperative that we represent the best interests of all the people of Northern Ireland — I believe that we will — in getting what is right for them. That is our primary focus. It was my focus the day after the referendum, it is still my focus, and it will continue to be so.

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Will the Speaker take a view on the First Minister's answers? When I asked a question, she declined to answer on the basis that that matter had not been discussed at the summit in Cardiff, yet later she gave her critique of a document that could not possibly have been discussed in Cardiff because it was published only yesterday. That is not the consistency that we expect of our First Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. I will consider the point of order and refer it to the Speaker. I also remind Members that Ministers give the answers that Ministers give. That is very often the case.

Intergovernmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): I wish to make a statement regarding a bilateral meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on cooperation on criminal justice matters held in Dublin on Monday 4 July 2016. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order, please. I ask Members to leave quietly. The Minister is on her feet.

Ms Sugden: This was the first occasion on which I represented the Executive at these meetings with Frances Fitzgerald, the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. The bilateral meeting provided an opportunity for Minister Fitzgerald and me to make acquaintance and to foster new and closer working relationships between our two jurisdictions. The intergovernmental agreement provides a helpful framework for supporting North/South cooperation on criminal justice matters. I am committed to developing our cross-border relationships for the good of the people of Northern Ireland. It is my intention to keep the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement.

I expect that most Members are familiar with the mechanics of the intergovernmental agreement. Briefly, there is a requirement for our respective Justice Ministers to meet annually and agree a collaborative work programme. The intergovernmental agreement's work programme runs from summer to summer. Our meeting on 4 July provided an opportunity to review progress against the 2015-16 joint work programme. It was pleasing to note the positive progress that has been made in a number of areas and the good collaborative working that has been built up by the criminal justice agencies, North and South.

The backbone of the agreement is the work of the project advisory groups, of which there are five and which bring together practitioners from criminal justice agencies from both sides of the border who have experience of delivering operationally at the front line. The project advisory groups serve to facilitate and promote the exchange of ideas and best practice approaches to problem-solving to our mutual benefit. I will highlight just a few examples.

We have seen the benefits of such collaboration through the excellent work between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána to increase capacity among officers in dealing with diverse communities both North and South. Whilst we both acknowledge the progress that there has been, the Tánaiste and I believe that there is potential for more learning in that area. We have therefore asked this to be considered as part of the 2016-17 work programme.

The value of our cross-border relationship is also evidenced through the excellent cooperation between the two probation services. For example, the agreement of offender behaviour programmes for high-risk offenders recently saw the first group of offenders completing the programme in Dublin. It is now planned that both services will meet to review progress and assimilate learning. The Probation Board for Northern Ireland also took part in a conference earlier this year organised by the National Office for the Prevention of Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Ireland to help inform the delivery of a national programme in the South. Later this year, Dublin will host the joint annual public protection seminar, which

I shall attend, as will Frances Fitzgerald. This is the seventh such event since devolution and a testimony to the success of the collaboration between our probation services.

Meanwhile, good engagement between criminal justice agencies and with voluntary sector partners continues to improve the experience of victims at court through the vehicle of the victim project advisory group. Ongoing support between the co-chairs has also been particularly beneficial in the implementation of the EU victims directive. Support and guidance is being provided to our Irish counterparts on the use of intermediaries in court following the success of our scheme.

Relationships established between our respective forensic services facilitated visits to Northern Ireland to participate in the development of the forensic service strategy for Northern Ireland and the exchange of information on drug trends. Best practice interaction in relation to DNA is also ongoing, with good on-the-ground arrangements in place. The strong rapport between the two youth justice services continues, with regular exchange visits taking place. Good relations between our Youth Justice Agency and an Garda Síochána in the sharing of information and development of best practice also supports the management of young offenders who seek to exploit the border for their own criminal purposes. Each of the project advisory groups has continued to promote and support cooperation across the broad spectrum of criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border. Frances Fitzgerald and I are committed to ensuring that that continues.

In going forward, the Tánaiste and I have commissioned our officials to develop a work programme for the year ahead. Building on the progress made last year, we recognised further potential under the existing themes. We have asked the five project advisory groups to develop activities that will further promote engagement in those areas. Frances Fitzgerald and I will consider the revised draft work programme when we meet later this month. It is my intention to provide a further progress report to the Assembly after that meeting and when we will publish the 2016-17 work programme.

I also want to take the opportunity to update Members on the joint agency task force. I welcome the progress made towards tackling serious and organised crime by the cross jurisdictional joint agency task force in the last six months. The task force, which was established under the Fresh Start Agreement, has carried out a series of operations tackling areas such as rural crime, child sexual exploitation and human trafficking for labour exploitation. An Garda Síochána and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, together with other statutory agencies, have worked collectively in a partnership approach on both sides of the border. The results have included a number of arrests, the seizure of illicit goods and the return of stolen items to their owners. The task force will continue to report regularly to the IGA on its ongoing work as required under the Fresh Start Agreement.

Given that when we met on 4 July we were in the initial wake of the UK referendum to leave Europe, Frances Fitzgerald and I also had a short discussion on Brexit. We shared the view that the need to maintain close working relationships in the justice field is more important now than ever. We have commissioned a programme of work that will allow us to better understand the implications in

the criminal justice sector of the decision in the recent referendum. Since devolution, the criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border have worked hard to develop a culture of cooperation and mutual support. I want that relationship to continue. Brexit will undoubtedly challenge the unique arrangements that we have on this island. However, I trust that the good relationships that have been established will position us to continue to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes from any future negotiations. That is crucial to protecting the safety and security of all the people on this island.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Minister for her statement, in which she referred to fostering new and closer working relationships and developing a culture of cooperation and mutual respect. She referred to five advisory groups. In her efforts to address crime and corruption, did the discussions include cross-border financial crime and corruption, which is becoming an increasingly important area, particularly in light of the recent allegations that were made in the BBC 'Spotlight' programme regarding the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA)?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. At the meeting of the intergovernmental agreement group, the Tánaiste and I discussed a number of issues including those that affect the border. Most prominently, hate crime, rural crime, domestic and sexual violence and abuse, victims, fuel fraud and human trafficking were discussed. I note the Member's comments. If it is something that I need to raise at my next meeting with the Tánaiste, I am quite happy to do so.

11.30 am

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for her statement to the House. She has indicated a very welcome cooperation between the probation boards in the two countries. What new ideas and learning on the prevention of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence did Probation Board NI take away from the conference? What initiatives are in place to improve information sharing and prevent sex offenders and domestic violence offenders from using the border to prevent detection and carry on their abuse? Does the Minister realise that there is a significant problem in that area?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Chair for his questions. He will be familiar with the fact that tackling domestic and sexual abuse will be my overarching priority for the next five years, so I welcomed the opportunity to discuss that with Tánaiste Fitzgerald when we met in July.

I want to highlight the importance of cross-border working in learning from shared experiences. It is about how we can do that. I think that our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland can take away the experiences that we have had in Northern Ireland, particularly the pilot of the domestic violence court in the city of Derry.

The problem-solving approach to justice will be another thread that runs through my next five years in office. It is about taking a common-sense approach to how we tackle issues in the criminal justice system to satisfy the needs of those who find themselves in the system and look at better and more efficient ways of working so that we can speed up justice.

Mr Sheehan: The joint agency task force has been established. Is the Minister satisfied that it has the necessary resources to operate effectively and that there will be no negative impact from the recent Brexit referendum?

Ms Sugden: Yes, at this stage, I am quite content that we can work collaboratively on sharing information and best practice. Indeed, that work was ongoing long before my tenure in the office. The work addresses issues such as rural crime, child exploitation, financial crime, illicit drugs, excise fraud and human trafficking. Regardless of the outcomes of Brexit, those issues would still come up in Northern Ireland and, indeed, in the Republic of Ireland concurrently. As we share that special relationship with our colleagues in the South, it will be good to ensure that this work is continued and perhaps even strengthened, even in the wake of Brexit.

Mr Attwood: I welcome the fact that the meeting addressed the joint agency task force to tackle organised crime and criminality. Inevitably and properly, that will deal with paramilitarism. As the Minister will be aware, in Dublin today the British and Irish Governments are entering into a treaty to deal with paramilitarism. A four-person commission will also be established, two of whom will be nominated by the Executive. Will you advise when the Executive will nominate its two members of that commission? Are you being consulted about who those people should be?

Ms Sugden: I do not have that information at this stage. The Member rightly points to the joint agency task force and the collaborative working on tackling paramilitary activity. That is really important and I appreciate the comments. Indeed, that leads us to the work that we are doing in relation to the Fresh Start Agreement and how we can do that. Again, we are mindful that we have to look at all the various agencies when consulting on that, as well as the community and voluntary sector. Undoubtedly, that will include people in the border areas.

Mr Lunn: The Minister's statement points to a high level of cooperation between North and South, which is very welcome. I only hope that it does not come to a juddering halt in about two years' time.

Specifically, I understand that drug courts operate in Dublin, which enable offenders to access programmes that are led by the probation service there — the statement refers to those — to tackle their addictions and turn away from crime. In the context of our proposed problem-solving courts, is there any intention to try to learn from their model?

Ms Sugden: By all means. My Department has continued to take a problem-solving approach from the previous mandate. I am keen to explore it, as it seems that problem-solving courts have been quite successful across other parts of the world, for example in North America and Scotland. We can learn from that. It is a common-sense approach to tackling these things, and it will have wider positive implications for the rest of the criminal justice system. I take the point.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her statement. I welcome the update on the work of the cross-jurisdictional joint agencies task force to tackle serious and organised crime. Can the Minister provide further details regarding the number of arrests made in Northern Ireland, the

volume and type of illicit goods seized and when she expects prosecutions to take place?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her questions. I do not have that information to hand, but I am happy to write to her. Cross-border working has been very successful, and I am aware that a number of arrests will be taking place. It is really a case of coordinating that. I am quite happy to provide the Member with those details.

Ms Boyle: I thank the Minister for her statement. In a letter to the Committee for Justice, the Chief Constable raised a number of issues relating to high-priority policing and criminal justice matters. Europol obviously no longer provides information on criminal activity across Europe. Given that one of those high-priority issues is child sexual exploitation and abuse, can the Minister give assurances that she and her counterparts will keep those high-priority issues, which also include cybercrime and international organised crime, high on the agenda? I welcome the fact that the Minister will work with her counterparts on a commissioned work programme. When are we likely to have an update on that?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her questions. Of course, child sexual exploitation and cybercrime are high on our priorities for cross-border working. Indeed, we have seen an increase in crime of this nature. Crimes within the cyber arena are becoming more prevalent. They are almost hidden, because it is difficult to catch someone working from behind a keyboard. At our most recent joint agency task force group, I raised the issue of cybercrime, because it is moving more quickly than we are. We need to get on top of it. Every Member will be familiar with the opportunities that these criminals take through the Internet. There is a serious amount of work. It seems to be almost a channel for other types of crime, as well as those direct crimes that actually happen online.

As the Member rightly said, we need to focus on child sexual exploitation, and I confirm that I am keen to do that.

Mr Aiken: I welcome the Minister's statement. I imagine that, during cross-border discussions, cross-border financial crime, particularly white-collar crime, would be of considerable concern, particularly to the Irish Government, especially as we look forward to the publication of the NAMA report that we expect presently from the Irish Government. Will the Minister please state that she does not feel in any way constrained by the First Minister, deputy First Minister or Finance Minister and can set her own agenda, particularly on issues of financial crime and NAMA?

Ms Sugden: I can absolutely confirm that I do not feel constrained in issues surrounding NAMA. I have a body of work which I am quite keen to get on with. NAMA was not covered in discussions at my recent meeting with Frances Fitzgerald, but, as the Member's party colleague suggested, it is something that we can look at. There are a lot of impending issues that I feel I need to prioritise. Certainly, the impact of Brexit will be a big consideration in cross-border working. There is an opportunity, as part of our continued working relationship with colleagues in the South, to strengthen our approach to the challenges of Brexit.

We will need to focus on rural crime. Members who represent such areas will be familiar with rural crime, which is almost heightened because of their proximity to the border and how that affects things.

My first meeting with Frances Fitzgerald was an opportunity to strengthen that relationship and understand the day-to-day problems that we are facing on the entire island, whether in Northern Ireland or in Ireland. That relationship is important so that we can all put our best foot forward.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for her statement. Whilst she was not able to answer Mr Attwood's question about the composition of the Independent Reporting Commission, I trust that, when she next reports on an IGA meeting, she will be able to tell us about the discussions that she and Frances Fitzgerald have had about the operation of that.

Two years ago, some of us remember the very great problem that this society nearly ended up with because of the opt-out engineered by Theresa May and Chris Grayling from European justice and home affairs measures, particularly the danger of very nearly losing the European arrest warrant. What discussions has the Minister had with Frances Fitzgerald on ensuring that we maintain a measure that is at least similar to the European arrest warrant if the UK were to leave the European Union?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his questions. When I get five years into this job, I may be better equipped to answer some of the questions that he suggested that he was able to answer as Minister.

We are quite confident that we will be able to maintain the European arrest warrant. These arrangements, as the Member will know, were put in place not necessarily with any consideration of leaving the EU but for the sake of pragmatic working across the jurisdictions. That will not be a threat. When we discussed the European arrest warrant at our most recent meeting, we were confident that we could secure it moving forward.

Mr Allister: In answer to Mr Aiken, the Minister said that she did not feel constrained by political influences inhibiting the investigation of financial crime and corruption. As Justice Minister in this jurisdiction, what steps has she taken since last Tuesday night's BBC 'Spotlight' exposé of precisely such corruption and financial crime? What steps has she taken to ensure that such matters are not swept under the carpet and that those culpable, whoever they might be, are brought to justice?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. I remind Members that all questions have to be relevant to the statement made. I will refer it to the Minister as to whether she chooses to reply.

Ms Sugden: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I am quite happy to say to the Member that, as Justice Minister, I consider all things. I may not make statements as frequently as the Member does for the sake of posturing, but I consider everything. It would be irresponsible of me not to do so.

Mr Hussey: I apologise to the Minister for not being here for the start of her statement, but I have read your statement and was paying attention as you spoke. You referred to paramilitarism and also to forensic services. Clearly, in the Republic of Ireland, quite a few explosive devices and arms caches have been found. Will you assure the House that any evidence gathered that is forensically linked to the previous use of weapons etc that may relate to crimes in Northern Ireland will be provided by the Southern authorities to the Northern authorities?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. We discussed the forensic arrangement around information

sharing and best practice. Those specific issues were not discussed, but I will keep it in mind for potential further meetings.

Private Members' Business

Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport

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

Mr Girvan: I beg to move

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of competitiveness and availability of rail services between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to investigate all options for remedial action including the reintroduction of the Lisburn to Antrim rail link.

11.45 am

I take this opportunity to bring the motion to the House on the basis that, since the closure of the Knockmore line in 2003, an area of Northern Ireland has been denied access to the rail network. In the past, it seemed to be the policy to close rail lines. The Bleach Green line was also one of the lines in question. It was reopened and is now one of the busiest routes. If you build it, they will come. I am taking the line that we have villages and towns along the route, such as Crumlin, Glenavy and Ballinderry, that have all grown dramatically. In fact, Crumlin has grown extensively since 1999 and would, in fact, be nearly double the size that it was at that time. As a consequence, it is an area that could and should have that rail link re-established. The Knockmore line has been in place and to date — not from 2003, but from 2010 until now — has cost £1.5 million to maintain in a state of potential readiness. It is also used as a training link.

Our main angle in the motion is to bring another form of transport and connectivity to the International Airport. Unfortunately, our International Airport has not necessarily had the same help and assistance that Dublin Airport has. Dublin has managed to get round what I deem to be an excuse that we have used in relation to state aid to actually encourage that and suck the life out of our International Airport. In fact, it has done nothing but attract routes for which potentially we should become a hub. I want to grow the traffic to the International Airport. I do not see the point when they say that they need 10 million passengers coming into the airport before they see the necessity of a rail network. I believe that we have to put the investment into the infrastructure and ensure that we have it there. I believe that if you have that, you will attract those routes to our area.

The other opportunity that we have is something that we have not made use of up to now. In fact, it has been mentioned in the Committee for Infrastructure. We have a rail network that is not being used for freight. I believe that we could establish the International Airport as a major freight hub, not just for Northern Ireland but for the whole United Kingdom, as a consequence of that. A very large area of zoned land around the airport has already been identified for potential growth of the airport. We should encourage that. To do so, the Executive need to make a decision not just to mothball the rail estate that we have but to actually make use of it and give another opportunity for additional links to Lisburn, Antrim and Belfast. That is on

the back of what we have already encountered up to now, which has been to see nothing but the lack of a joined-up approach, both from Translink — I will use Translink as the overall head as it used to be — and the rail and bus networks not being totally joined together. That seemed to be a point —

Mr Clarke: The Member talks about Translink. I am sure that he is aware that a bus leaves the International Airport every 15 minutes to take passengers to Belfast. Do we not see the benefit then of a rail link that gives passengers an option and removes some of the traffic congestion on our roads?

Mr Girvan: I see that as a vital point. We do need to see that complementing, not taking away from. On the basis that we have an existing railway running very close to the airport, it is vital that we make use of the land that is already zoned and bring a rail halt to the airport itself.

As well as mentioning what goes on from a Translink point of view on the roads, I must say that Templepatrick is a village that is being blighted by traffic all day, every day. As a consequence, it is vital that we try to remove some of those bus runs coming through what is a sleepy village every 15 minutes. I use the term “sleepy village”, but it has become a place on a major commuting route to our International Airport. As a consequence, we need to look at other ways of dealing with that traffic.

The only quick fix that I see currently is to encourage a rail link. Ultimately, we would like to have the opportunity to look at having some form of link to the M2. If that is a possibility, it is something that we should look at. However, we currently have infrastructure that we should be locking into for the airport itself.

Spending £1.5 million — what I call “putting a sticking plaster on” — is throwing money down the drain. We would be better investing money.

Mr Aiken: Does the Member agree that one of the significant issues that we have in South Antrim is an infrastructure problem, full stop? That has been caused by considerable underinvestment over the years. Part and parcel of looking at Belfast International Airport, which is our key international hub and one of our major economic areas, is being able to develop a broad-ranging infrastructure strategy, particularly for South Antrim.

Mr Girvan: I have absolutely no problem with that, and that is one area that we should look at. Not just South Antrim but Northern Ireland as a region should be putting that forward. I know that the Minister will focus on that.

The line was closed in 2003, under the leadership of the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP. They were aware of what was going on in pulling out of what was a potential jewel in the crown of having a rail link to our airport. In fact, it is not that long ago since a question was asked in the House on what help could be given to Dublin to create a rail link to Dublin Airport. That is just sucking the life out of what is here. Those who represent border areas such as Newry and the Mourne may say that Dublin is closer, but why should we not look at the infrastructure that we have in Northern Ireland to ensure that passengers use it and make the best of it? That is what we should be doing: making sure that our network is there.

I know that the freight aspect is something that the airport would welcome, because there is an opportunity there.

We have slots available. There are difficulties with flying into Belfast harbour airport at night — I still call it “Belfast harbour airport”. I want to see Belfast International Airport being the main way forward. There is an opportunity for us to designate an enterprise zone in the airport area, not just to build up distribution networks but to drive business into the area.

South Antrim is an area that I have a great love for. I represent it and want to pull as much into it as possible. I want to see that the networks there are not being lost. We had a fantastic rail network in Northern Ireland back in the 1950s, but it has been disappearing ever since.

Mr Dickson: I thank Mr Girvan for giving way. Does he also recognise that, in order to achieve his ambitions for additional rail services in that part of South Antrim, the Minister needs to give serious consideration to the dualling of the Dargan Bridge as it crosses the river at York Street? Unless that is included in the York Street interchange, none of the rail improvements referred to will ever be able to happen because of the engineering contingencies of the interchange.

Mr Girvan: I do not know enough about the intricacies of the full rail network, but I ask those who have the expertise to look at this, because I see the Knockmore line as an opportunity to create a loop. Effectively, where we are talking about dualling railways along the route, given the opportunity, it can be dealt with.

I met the people of Glenavy and Crumlin, all of whom are requesting additional services.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Girvan: They believe that the railway stations in their villages should be opened again and used.

Mrs Palmer: I welcome the motion. I am pleased that the party that tabled it has finally decided that a rail link between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport is worth serious consideration.

The Ulster Unionist Party's document, ‘A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU’, which was launched only yesterday, identified 10 key asks, one of which was a trebling of the investment in infrastructure, including hard infrastructure such as airports, roads and railways. We have urged the Northern Ireland Executive to treble their investment in infrastructure. That will require making the case to HM Government that investing some of the funding currently being directed to Brussels should be used to increase Northern Ireland's competitiveness.

There is no doubt that, in an ideal world, we would have a rail link to the International Airport. In Great Britain, there are direct rail links to all London airports as well as to Birmingham and Manchester airports, Newcastle airport is connected to the city centre by the Tyneside metro and Edinburgh is connected by a hugely expensive and recently completed tram system. However, Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds Bradford, East Midlands and Bristol airports do not have train links to their city centres and all rely on shuttle buses, as is the case for the International Airport.

With regard to the International Airport, it is obvious that improving transportation links to our largest airport would yield benefits to tourism and the local economy.

Additionally, any modernisation and extension of the rail network in Northern Ireland has some intrinsic value as we seek to increase the use of public transport. In 2013, my colleague Danny Kennedy commissioned a consultation that estimated that the cost of reopening the Antrim/Knockmore line with a halt at the International Airport would cost in the region of £50.5 million. That cost would be substantial, and there would also be ongoing maintenance costs.

The key question from the motion is whether the benefit outweighs the cost to the taxpayer. If the new Minister should use his limited funds, bearing in mind the vast deficit being dealt with in the Department, to fund this, presumably that would be at the expense of other projects. It would be better to concentrate on the completion of the Belfast hub project, which has the potential to transform public transport in Northern Ireland and to improve and renew the Northern Ireland Railways fleet.

Evidence suggests that, until recently, the DUP did not feel that the project was a priority use of funding. Only five months ago, the former Minister for Regional Development, Michelle McIlveen, said:

“my understanding is that the usage of the airport would need to increase to around 10 million passengers to make that rail link viable”. — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 112, p25, col 2].

In April, the managing director of Belfast International, Mr Graham Keddie, stated that he believed that the airport would serve five million people this year, taking into account the additional passengers travelling for major events like the Euros and the Olympic Games. That number does, however, fall well short of the volume necessary to make a rail link financially viable.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Member giving way. Has she taken into account the difference between a railway system to serve an airport and a railway to serve the population between Antrim and Lisburn as well as the airport? That makes a fundamental difference to the numbers involved.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Palmer: I do not concur with my friend's opinion that another five million passengers could be found with that rail link.

With that context in mind, I wonder whether the motion is motivated more by the desire to be seen to be doing something than by genuine belief that this is the best use of departmental funds.

That is especially true in the context of Brexit, which the party that tabled the motion so vociferously supported. Translink's rail service has already availed itself of a great deal of European funding, hence the EU flag on almost every train run by the service. Given that we are set to lose out on £58 million of TEN-T funding, I must ask where those who tabled the motion intend to find the money for this project.

12.00 noon

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way on that point. I take the Member back to the start of her contribution, when she talked about their 10-point plan, which, by her own admission, was launched only yesterday. In your

contribution today, you said that infrastructure projects were on that list; indeed, you went on to say that the linkage between the International Airport and the City Airport was on that list. Maybe you can tell us in your contribution where you are getting the money for your 10-point plan.

Mrs Palmer: It is for you boys to have the negotiations in Europe.

Given that we are set to lose out on £58 million in TEN-T funding, I must ask where those who tabled the motion intend to find the money for this project.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Mrs Palmer: It is only fair — I did not hear you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude her remarks. The time has now expired.

Mrs Palmer: Is there not an extra minute, Mr Deputy Speaker?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I have already allowed the extra minute. Thank you.

Mrs Palmer: I will finish. It would be cynical of me, of course, to suggest that now that the DUP —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I advise the Member that time is up.

Mrs Palmer: — no longer bears primary responsibility for funding —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to resume her seat. Time is now up.

Mr F McCann: Like many here today, I will speak in support of the intent of the motion and its call for rail services to connect Belfast city centre with Belfast International Airport. The destruction of the rail networks many years ago was short-sighted and led to the isolation of many communities across the North, especially in rural towns that had a rich history of rail provision. In fact, I believe that we lost something when we moved from the train to the car. Whilst I understand that there are now a number of public transport options available to people to get from A to B, the fact remains that rail can be more efficient, is cleaner and sends out all the right signals to encourage people to get out of the car or bus and on to a greener, cleaner mode of travel.

Between 4 July and 13 July this year, Belfast International Airport expected over 200,000 people to pass through its doors, an increase of 30,000 over the same period last year. Most of them travelled by road to reach the airport. That figure is expected to increase over the next number of years. In fact, Belfast International Airport showed a 9% increase in 2015, with figures of 4.4 million, and that is also expected to increase. Also, there is a huge increase in the number of people using Belfast City Airport. That is a clear indication that more and more people are choosing to use local airports as their first choice of travel.

I understand that people argued a number of years ago that the rail route would not be financially viable, but what has not been considered is the impact of making the decision to create a rail connection between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport, which could lead

to a serious rise in passenger usage at the airport. It would offer an alternative form of travel to the tens of thousands who use their car or a bus. It could revitalise the small communities in its wake and send a positive message that we are committed to rail as a positive mode of transport. It could offer competition in provision and could lead to a business hub in the shadow of the airport that creates thousands of new jobs.

I take into consideration what the previous Member to speak said: how do we find the money and the resources at present to drive that forward? That is a crucial element in the whole debate about how we create and bring in new rail networks to different parts of the North. The parties in here probably need to get their heads around and discuss the impact of taking the train rather than the car or the bus. I leave it in the hands of the Executive to work out the best way.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. It is right and proper to ask where the funding is coming from. If you look at the way we have worded the motion — you have picked up the essence of it, unlike the previous Member — you will see that we are asking the Minister and his Department to investigate options. Among those options is Ballymartin park-and-ride, which has not even been talked about. It is another facility where we are bringing people out of Belfast, removing some of the tensions in Belfast and, indeed, actually increasing investment because people on business can move, making their journeys easier. We are not suggesting that the Minister must do it, we are asking him to investigate ways in which it can be done.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr F McCann: I do not disagree with what has been said. In many ways, everything we discuss here is a wish list for somewhere down the line. I believe that the current Minister for Infrastructure is a person who is not only willing to listen but will also look at how best to plan and put into operation things that could benefit our communities in the longer term down the road.

Mr McCrossan: I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in support of the motion, and I thank the proposers for bringing this important issue to the House.

The SDLP supports improved connectivity between all our airports and rail services. Access to airports through direct railways is a hallmark of most major European and international cities and is essential to expanding Northern Ireland as a business and tourist destination. Airport rail links are vital to any European city and any country that must compete for inward investment. Over the summer holidays, like many in the House, I have been abroad. I have been to London and Barcelona, and it amazes me how connected public transport is and how efficient the services are. It should be our ambition in Northern Ireland to seize the opportunity and reap the many benefits that airport and rail connectivity can bring.

As we consider the Programme for Government and the infrastructural needs, it is my view that a modern Northern Ireland must have modern rail infrastructure and we must ensure the continued development of a modern railway system throughout the North and across the island.

Minister, the fact that, in 2016, we do not have a rail link to Belfast International Airport or any other airport is nothing short of scandalous. Any airport rail link to and from Belfast International Airport has the potential to stimulate

economic growth not only in Belfast but throughout Northern Ireland. It also has the potential to assist with the growth of tourism through the provision of direct access for air passengers and would offer a long-term sustainable public transport alternative for accessing Belfast International Airport. It would reduce congestion and provide important environmental benefits, as articulated by other Members.

Over the past number of years, there have been several proposals put forward on establishing a direct line to Belfast International Airport including reopening the Knockmore line through the construction of a rail spur to provide a halt serving the airport. If operational, the Knockmore line would enable the airport to be accessed directly from stations across Northern Ireland through connecting with existing services from Lisburn to Belfast or Portadown and from Antrim to Belfast. It would also allow for far greater west to east train connectivity because the Knockmore line would link Belfast International Airport and Derry. There is also potential to link Derry with Dublin for a train journey that would last three and a half hours. We have considered the infrastructure deficits in the west including the failure to develop the A5 and the A6, and I have spoken clearly about them since I was elected. Expanding the limited rail infrastructure could go some way to alleviating the regional imbalance. My constituents and the people of the west have suffered for decades.

We must also consider the cost. It has been estimated that re-opening the Knockmore line may cost in the region of £100 million. I ask the Minister how much it has cost to maintain the line in the 13 years since it was closed. We know that, since 2012, it has cost £1.5 million, despite being used only in an emergency. I ask the Minister, rather than pay for a railway line that serves little purpose, to invest in and pay for a railway line that serves the North and its people. The Minister has also said that in order for the service to become economically sustainable there needs to be 10 million passengers per year, which is 5.5 million short. From the population projections, the airport will reach 10 million by 2035. I ask the Minister if it would be better to invest now rather than pushing the issue down the track for another day?

Although today's debate focuses solely on Belfast International Airport, we must also consider rail connectivity to the other regional airports: Belfast City, and the City of Derry. At the former, the Sydenham halt is about half a mile down the road from the airport, and you often see passengers with suitcases walking along the road in very dangerous circumstances. That is not acceptable, and it is my view that the halt could be moved adjacent to Belfast City Airport, with an over-road accommodation bridge for foot passengers. I would welcome the Minister's views on this and whether a feasibility study has been conducted.

To conclude, I support today's motion. The rail infrastructure in the North is not fit for purpose, and if we genuinely want to compete internationally for investment and boost local tourism, airport rail connectivity plays a central role and it is up to the Minister to lead on this. Minister, I believe that you could lead fully on this and set the bar very high.

Ms Armstrong: On behalf of the Alliance Party, I support this motion, which highlights this key question for the Minister: how attractive is he making Northern Ireland for business travellers and tourism? If we are to attract inward

investment and grow our tourism market, we need better connectivity and investment in public transport solutions. By making it easier for people to get about, we make Northern Ireland easier to visit and therefore easier to do business with.

I welcome the call for the Minister to investigate options that would enable the reopening of the Lisburn to Antrim line and provide accessibility to Belfast International Airport, for the following reasons. First, local people want this line reopened. The local community in Crumlin, Glenavy, Ballinderry and the surrounding areas support the reopening of the Lisburn to Antrim line. The local community has petitioned my colleague David Ford, who has consistently brought the issue to successive Ministers, only to be told that it will be considered in the future as part of a long-term plan — on the long finger. The line was closed in 2003; that is 13 years ago. That is a very long finger.

The local community is very frustrated by the lack of progress on this issue. During recent Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council community planning consultation sessions, the community reiterated its wish for the line to be reopened and for the council to initiate a project under the connecting our communities theme, potentially in partnership with the Department. This opportunity will not progress if the Minister and the Department continue to consider the issue on the long finger. The Minister should look to his regional development strategy, where an increasing modal shift from car to public transport figures strongly. In this instance, we have a community who would use the public transport system but are unable to do so because the line is closed to the public. The line is maintained and operational for training and emergency rail use, at considerable cost, as has already been mentioned, but it is not available for use by passengers. Really? We spend £1.5 million and it is not available to passengers?

Secondly, the Minister and his Department have predetermined the cost-benefit of reopening the line as being too expensive, based on a Translink estimate of £100 million and not on actual cost. In July this year, in response to a written question from David Ford, the Minister confirmed that the reopening of the Antrim to Bleach Green line cost £18.2 million. While I accept that the Lisburn to Antrim line may be more expensive, it does raise the question of whether the £100 million is a fact-based figure, or a guesstimate.

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Ms Armstrong: I will.

Mr Aiken: It might be of interest to note, particularly on the Mossley line, that when the original projections on cost were made, there was not expected to be any growth in traffic. At the time, there was a lot of criticism of the investment in it. I understand that the Minister has some choices to make, but one of the most interesting things is the idea that if you build it, they will come. There is no doubt that there is a large amount of interest in improving rail links through this area, and I encourage the Minister in particular to get the Department to look critically at future growth projections rather than present growth, particularly across the great constituency of South Antrim. Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you. It is, therefore, appropriate that the Minister considers reopening the line using fact-based figures —

Mr Clarke: On that point, will the Member give way?

Ms Armstrong: Can I continue, or I will run out of time? Thank you. An investigation will give Translink the opportunity to provide a detailed business case showing the actual cost to maintain and modernise the line, with a view to reopening it for passenger use. It is not appropriate for the Minister or his Department to continue to ignore the opportunity on the basis of an estimate.

Thirdly —

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way very briefly?

Ms Armstrong: Yes, certainly — briefly.

Mr Ford: Since my colleague was not a Member of the House at the time, I am sure that she is unaware that a few years ago — before the property crash — a private business was interested in investing in the line, given the development opportunities on it, which could well have provided a cost-effective service. It would undoubtedly have been significantly cheaper than the £100 million guesstimate that is being prepared, particularly in light of what Mr Aiken highlighted about the potential for growth.

12.15 pm

Ms Armstrong: Thank you.

I was talking about figures, and the third reason that is repeatedly given is that passenger numbers through Belfast International Airport need to be around 10 million. I am unclear as to what that figure is based on. Is it the Translink calculation whereby the number of passenger trips is counted, or is it the throughflow in the airport? If we are to understand whether the project is to be economically viable, we need figures quoted as targets to be clarified.

If we assume that the 10 million is the number of passengers, the airport's ability to grow to reach the proposed figure is being stymied by the lack of joined-up or integrated transport solutions for onward travel for business and other passengers. This lack of joined-up regional transport planning and provision has been highlighted by airlines over a number of years, but, amazingly, no survey of the business or tourism community appears to have been completed to establish whether better connectivity to Aldergrove would benefit or improve business.

The regional development strategy highlighted the need to promote regional gateways as economic development opportunities, to exploit the economic development of the key transport corridors, to undertake or, where appropriate, facilitate a programme of infrastructure improvement essential to business needs and to promote a sustainable approach to the provision of tourism. If the Minister is to deliver the regional development strategy to 2025, he must take action to consider the viability of opening the line and enabling better connectivity. As was mentioned, it needs to take into consideration the Yorkgate interchange and creating that better connectivity to Belfast International Airport.

While I appreciate the loss of potential income streams following Brexit, I reiterate that we need to make Northern Ireland attractive to business and tourist travellers by making it easy to travel once they arrive here.

Finally, if Northern Ireland is to reduce carbon emissions and congestion, the Minister and the Department for Infrastructure must create the ability for modal shift and prioritise investment in public transport.

When I was in business, I travelled to England often, and it was easy to go to a meeting in a place where there was onward travel availability. My counterparts do not come to Northern Ireland because it is too difficult to travel across the country here.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms Armstrong: Road building has been prioritised over public transport. If we want to entice businesses and tourists and meet the needs of our local communities —

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

Ms Armstrong: — there needs to be a shift in departmental investment.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is good to see you in the Chair.

Mr Ford and I go back a very long way on this issue. I remember standing in Crumlin with Oliver Frawley fighting the campaign to keep the Knockmore to Antrim railway line open. As I look at mothballed railway lines, particularly at one that runs through my constituency between Lisburn and Banbridge, I think of the time that would be taken off the Belfast to Dublin rail route if that line had been kept open, so avoiding Lurgan and the problems that arise every so often when some brave Irish heroes think that they will achieve a united Ireland by blocking the railway line between Belfast and Dublin. I can only look with regret at the mothballing of that railway line, which is probably beyond bringing back. However, when I look at the Knockmore to Sprucefield railway line, it is not beyond bringing back. There is every opportunity to restore that railway line with imagination, conviction and good business sense. That is why we tabled the motion. We do not believe that it will be delivered very quickly, but, nonetheless, we believe that it can be achieved, and we need to focus on it and target it.

Mrs Armstrong's last comment about England being so much easier to travel around than Northern Ireland is patent nonsense. Most people who come from England remark on how much easier it is to travel around Northern Ireland than it is to travel around England, where the rail networks are heavily congested.

Mr McCrossan: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Yes, I will give way. The rail networks are heavily congested and heavily overpriced.

Mr McCrossan: In England, you can get on a train, travel anywhere with no difficulty, there are the necessary halts and there is accessibility. We are completely and utterly disconnected, and that needs to be appreciated in this debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Poots: Thank you for that, Mr Deputy Speaker. Travelling around England is a nightmare —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Allow me to respond to the point, Mr Aiken. Travelling around England is a nightmare compared with Northern Ireland. Our public transport network is not as good as it should be, and considerable work has to be done on that, but Northern Ireland is a very accessible place, and it takes little over an hour to get from one side of it to the other.

I look forward to hearing from Mr Aiken, because the last time I heard from him he seemed to contradict his colleague who spoke earlier. I am completely confused about what the Ulster Unionist position is. Are they supporting the motion? Are they against the motion? Do they want to see the railway re-established? Does Mr Aiken want this service running through his constituency? It appeared that Mrs Palmer did not, so perhaps he can clarify that.

Mr Frew: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I will let Mr Aiken go ahead.

Mr Aiken: I was asking the Member to give way to support the Member's statement about English railways. As somebody who has been stuck in what the Great Western Railway laughably called the rapid transit route across the central section of England, I can fully appreciate those issues. It is unusual for someone to support your comment, but that is indeed true. We will address those other issues as we go further in the discussion. Thank you.

Mr Poots: Thank you very much for that very useful contribution, Mr Aiken.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for giving way, and I appreciate the work that the Member has put into the campaign over the last number of years around his constituency. How does it make you feel when you see a large party in this place — the Ulster Unionist Party — completely divided on this issue? It is very much like how they were divided in Europe, with some of their members campaigning to leave and others campaigning to stay. How does that make you feel?

Mr Poots: It does not really matter that much to me.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): We are going off the rails. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Poots: That is a fair comment, Mr Deputy Speaker, and we will try and get back on track.

Mr Hazzard has a very substantial job in terms of infrastructure in Northern Ireland. Considerable bounds have been made over the last 10 to 15 years. We look at the road network, at the train sets that have been bought and the quality of those train sets and at lines such as the Bangor to Portadown line, which is so well used. We want to extend and encourage that. We see in the new line to Londonderry that the numbers using it are 225% greater than anticipated. Let us reinvigorate our railways; let us see how we can invest in our railway systems to ensure that we do better. Connecting people in Lisburn and Antrim, who may well be in one constituency in due course, would be a great thing. We can do that together. The 10 million that is required for the airport is augmented by the numbers who are using it. You do not have 10

million passengers using the railway line; you need 10 million passengers going through the airport to get the appropriate number using the railway line.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Poots: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Kearney: Cuirim fáilte roimh an díospóireacht; tá sí iontach suntasach ar fad. Tá sé fíor-riachtanach go ndíríonn an Tionól a aird ar an cheist shuntasach seo. I speak in support of the motion. The reality is a lack of competitiveness and availability of rail services between Belfast and the International Airport. In my constituency of South Antrim there is indeed — it has been touched on by other Members — a long-held local desire for the Lisburn to Antrim rail line to be restored, and I support that wish.

There has been a dramatic increase in population growth in the wider Crumlin, Glenavy and Ballinderry area over the last 30 years. There has been a quite phenomenal explosion in population. Once small rural villages are now growing towns with large numbers commuting daily, particularly for work and education, into Belfast. This is a catchment that is badly served by public transport generally. Bus services in that part of the lough shore area are completely inadequate. The transport infrastructure in these parts of South Antrim does not correspond to the needs of local people. I welcome the fact that I and constituents will meet the Minister — in October, I hope — to deal with some of the issues that are now unfolding as a result of these serious difficulties in the local transport infrastructure.

The reality is that the design of local transport infrastructure fails to meet the needs of local business, and, in turn, that fails to assist in optimising economic growth or attracting new investment opportunities both locally and from abroad. Not surprisingly, in parallel with the growth in population, there has been a spike in car use, with inevitable environmental consequences in terms of the carbon footprint and so on.

The Antrim to Knockmore section of the Lisburn railway line runs directly past Belfast International Airport, yet, as others Members have correctly observed, there is no connection. The role of the airport complex as an economic driver for growth and investment in our regional economy cannot be ignored in the context of this debate. In the last two years, there has been a significant upswing in passenger footfall and air routes available through Aldergrove airport. The airport has also benefited from important commercial investment. It has the potential to become an enterprise zone in the future, and it should be recognised and nurtured as a strategic economic hub within the regional economy. However, that growth trajectory, that potential, is in fact fettered and limited by the absence of an overall integrated transport infrastructure.

I understand the business case that argues that passenger numbers in the airport do not meet the criteria for a direct rail connection from Belfast, but, equally, I do not accept that we should wait — I believe that we should not — until all the conditions are met before acting.

Mr Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way on that point about the passenger numbers. That is the point that we wanted to draw out in the intervention on Kellie Armstrong. I have a difficulty with the Department's projections. In the case of the projection for the Coleraine to Londonderry

line, when it was built, it was 225% more than was estimated. They cannot accurately estimate how many people will use a line. As you rightly said, the figures show that the population in those areas is growing. We suggest that, by default, the number of passengers will grow.

Mr Kearney: I thank the Member for that contribution. I will revisit that point in due course.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Kearney: We cannot approach the issue in zero-sum terms. If the proper standard of transport infrastructure, including rail provision, is put in place, economic growth, new investment and population expansion will inevitably follow. All the options, including investment in light rail rapid transport, should be considered fully. We need to come at this in terms of what we can do and what we ought to do, as opposed to what we cannot do, simply on the basis of what we are told.

I understand that the Minister must contend with unremitting pressure on his departmental budget. There will be the impacts of worsening austerity, due to British Tory policy, and the unforeseen economic and investment damage that will be caused as a result of the Brexit decision. In the face of that type of adversity, there is an even greater need for blue-sky thinking. I refer that point directly to my colleague's earlier intervention. We need to coordinate the transport policy with foreign direct investment, industrial policy in the Six Counties, job creation and environmental priorities. We should be innovative and ambitious, even with the limited resources available. In that sense, we need to think about investing to accumulate, arising from our neglected transport infrastructure.

All our Departments and officials need to think about strategic challenges differently. Thinking the same way and doing things the same way will only guarantee more of the same results. Investing in rail services between Belfast and the regional airport and in the Lisburn to Antrim rail link should be seen as a strategic opportunity.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Kearney: It will help to transform the regional economy and modernise our local transport infrastructure, particularly —

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

Mr Kearney: — in my constituency of South Antrim.

Mr Easton: I rise to support the motion and say from the outset that the motion is a no-brainer. At a time when we want to improve lives, enhance trade, create jobs, attract foreign investment and compete on a level playing field with our neighbours, we need to ensure that we have the best possible infrastructure to support those aims.

It is, therefore, vital, if we are to compete in a global economy, that our International Airport has the best possible infrastructure in place to attract all those aims.

12.30 pm

The lack of a fast, efficient rail network from Belfast to the International Airport is criminal and short-sighted and hampers growth and foreign investment in our

local economy. We know that one of the main factors in attracting business and, indeed, foreign airline companies to Northern Ireland is to have the right infrastructure in place for quick and easy access from the airport for passengers and businesses to the main investment hubs. The way to do that is to have a fast transport system. In a world that moves at a quick pace, we in Northern Ireland lack that facility and are lagging behind our competitors.

We know that our main competitors are seriously looking at the possibility of extending their infrastructure. For example, a second runway at Dublin Airport and a rail network straight into Dublin from the airport are under serious consideration. If we are serious about attracting foreign investment and jobs —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: Yes.

Mr Aiken: Does the Member agree with me that the activity of the Irish Government and the Dublin Airport Authority is anticompetitive and is definitely detrimental to the Northern Ireland economy, particularly the state funding for terminal 2, for the outstanding debt for Dublin Airport Authority's pension fund and for the second runway? Those are examples of anticompetitive behaviour that we in Northern Ireland need to fight against.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I do not disagree with him. I thank him for that.

OK, jobs —

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. There has been a lot of discussion lately about how difficult it can be for us to compete with Dublin Airport at times. Some things are outside our control. Dublin Airport is able to offer, for example, pre-clearance to the United States. Does a railway link at the airport not go some way towards making us a more attractive opportunity for travellers?

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree with that.

If we fail to act on the motion, our competitors will have the economic edge. We are aware that the former Department for Regional Development undertook a public consultation during 2013 and produced the 'Railway Investment Prioritisation Strategy', which was about how we could take forward and prioritise future investment in the Northern Ireland rail network up to 2035. One of the priorities identified was priority 3, which is what we are talking about today.

One of the main arguments that will be used for the case not to reopen the Antrim to Knockmore/Lisburn line will be that such an investment would not be viable because of airport passenger numbers, which in 2013 stood at around four million, and that, for the project to be viable, numbers need to grow to about 10 million. However, I argue that airport numbers are projected to grow to the 10 million mark by 2030. We can see from current levels that there has been an 8.9% increase in the past year, as well as a 2.5% increase in aircraft movements. We can see that there is positive movement in increased flight and passenger numbers. I argue that, if we had the right railway connection in place from the airport to Belfast, that would attract passengers and foreign investment and

enable us to compete with our neighbours and increase those numbers even more quickly.

The potential cost of reopening the Antrim to Knockmore line and providing a link to Belfast would be in and around £50 million. That would involve the rehabilitation and resignalling of the track between Antrim and Knockmore, the construction of a single-track spur and a rail halt at the airport, two additional trains, station renewals at Ballinderry, Crumlin and Glenavy and a park-and-ride. Failure to do those things would be folly. In 2014, Dr Peter Bolan, director for international travel and tourism management at Ulster University, stated that the lack of a rail link to Belfast International Airport was detrimental to Northern Ireland and one of the reasons that there had been a failure to secure a long-haul route to Canada.

Mr Ford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Easton: Very quickly.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the points that the Member makes. I am just slightly concerned that he does not seem to recognise that there were services on the Knockmore line until they were closed by a former Minister for Regional Development by the name of Gregory Campbell, whom he appears to have described as a criminal whose work is folly. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Easton: I thank the Member for his useless information.

Dr Bolan further said that, if Northern Ireland had serious ambitions to develop its economy by bringing in investment from places such as China or North America, it must improve its transport infrastructure, particularly to the main airport:

"International visitors simply just expect that but, instead, they're limited to buses and taxis, which isn't ideal."

As we enter talks on Brexit, we will enter a whole new set of negotiations for new and exciting global deals that we in Northern Ireland want to benefit from. If we want to benefit, it makes sense to invest in a rail link from Belfast to our main airport and show the world that we are open for business, investment and job opportunities.

Mr Aiken: We welcome the motion on providing improved access between Belfast and the International Airport; indeed, in our recently launched 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU', we have specifically called for improving infrastructure. I am sure that the Minister for Infrastructure and other Ministers are already aware of the ongoing discussions in London on the provision of a significant potential infrastructure stimulus. A stimulus like that could be transformational if it is used to significantly enhance our position as a gateway to the EU. End of plug.

It would also be useful to note that Belfast International Airport will come close to and might exceed 5.2 million passengers. 2017 is expected to be a better year, maybe pushing towards 7 million passengers. In the airport, retail and food and beverage outlets are reporting high double-digit increases in business. One of the things that I am most pleased to report is that that increased activity has generated over 800 jobs this year, with 100 additional posts to be created shortly. That is a great success story. Indeed, the 1,000-acre site is a major economic hub for Northern Ireland, second only to Belfast harbour estate for employment numbers. Airlines such as Ryanair and

easyJet have made Gatwick the most important airport for Northern Ireland passengers, eclipsing Heathrow, with extra capacity being added on that route all the time. With Ryanair launching four new routes, including Berlin and Milan, and with extra routes to come, everyone in the House will be pleased to note that the airport has had a very good season and is looking to have a better year next year. All in the Assembly should thank Graham Keddie and his team for all that they have done not only for South Antrim but for all of Northern Ireland.

Our major international gateway — this is where I agree with DUP Members — has been hampered by unfair competition. I welcome the opportunity to compare the access that has been afforded to the fully state-aided and state-supported edifice that is Dublin Airport and to observe and listen to the advertisements, again state-funded, about the so-called great access that Dublin Airport has, coupled with significant enhancements, including the potential provision of a new runway — again state-funded. It is of concern that Tourism Ireland, to which Northern Ireland contributes over a third of its budget, actively promotes Dublin Airport as the gateway to Ireland. That raises obvious concerns about competition. If you couple that with the abolition of Irish air passenger duty (APD), VAT at 9%, EU-funded roads and well-established transport links to two terminals, you can see that the improvements that Belfast International Airport has made are well-nigh remarkable and it should be supported for them.

The competition will be even further skewed as our major airports are being starved of access. Again, as has been pointed out, can we name any major airport on these islands that does not have at least dual carriageway access? I will ask you to indulge me, Mr Deputy Speaker, while I quote one of my constituents who has contacted me on the issue:

“Our roads access is deplorable. What other major international airport do you go to and get stuck behind a tractor or even worse ... Our roads owe more to the 1950's than the 21st century. We need at least carriageway access from the M2 with a potential Templepatrick bypass, and improvements to the other main access route, the A56 ... There is also no advance planning under way to build infrastructure to meet increased passenger demand ... Everything is left on the long finger ... As for rail, we were told years ago that a rail spur would only be viable if we hit 8 million. Yet, as numbers grow, there is no discussion on this matter.”

What are the Executive going to do about this, apart from utilising Dublin Airport regularly? I and, no doubt, all of the 1,000-plus workers who keep our airports working and the aircraft based here flying will be interested to see which Ministers and officials use Dublin rather than our own airports.

In supporting the motion, my party calls for a much wider discussion on improving access. We welcome an improved rail system across all of South Antrim. Connecting the airport should also include facilitating a major park-and-ride facility at Crumlin and a rail station at Ballymartin park-and-ride should be progressed with a degree of urgency. We would, as a matter of priority, push for a dual carriageway link from the M2 to be built first, and any additional infrastructure made available in the autumn statement should be fast-tracked to that provision. Indeed, the Executive, along with Antrim and Newtownabbey

Borough Council, could significantly push the success of this programme by fast-tracking the planning of such a link and doing it now.

More importantly, APD has to go, and we know that the Scottish Government are already planning to reduce theirs.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Aiken: Finally, while not germane to this discussion, we must address the challenge of Dublin Airport. We are all for competition —

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

Mr Aiken: — but competition against a state-aided airport seeking an all-island monopoly must be challenged. Thank you for your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Lyons: It is a privilege and a pleasure to follow the Member for South Antrim, who has been very positive about the motion, unlike his colleague from Lagan Valley. I am still not sure whether she supports the motion, but perhaps Mr Aiken can have a little word in her ear and get the support of —

Mrs Palmer: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I would rather not, but I will. I do not want to hear any negativity from the Member. If she is upbeat and positive, I will give way.

Mrs Palmer: I remind the Member that, in my opening remarks, I started by welcoming the motion and saying that we fully supported it but have issues.

Mr Lyons: I wish that she had continued in the vein in which she started. We are pleased that she now says that she will support the motion, and I welcome that.

I welcome the motion because I think that it is important that we have a rail link from Belfast International Airport to the city of Belfast. I am pleased that the motion asks for the Minister to explore options. It is important that we find out what is necessary for this to happen. Today, a lot of figures have been bandied about: the number of airport passengers we will need; the number of rail passengers we will need; how much it will cost to sustain the line; and the cost of maintaining the line in its current unused state. We need to explore this. We need to find out about and nail these figures down, because I understand that some of them are from quite a few years ago. It is important that we take the time and have the feasibility study originally proposed in the strategy produced by the Department for Regional Development a few years ago. If we had those facts, it would put us in a better position to —

Mr Aiken: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I will give way very briefly.

Mr Aiken: I ask the Minister to, instead of looking purely at the potential growth in the number of people using Belfast International Airport, take on board the views of all the South Antrim MLAs here. We talked about the overall growth of the population of the area and looked at that as part of a wider prospect. I am sure that the DUP would also be delighted to look at wider options to improve those links.

Mr Lyons: Certainly, people in South Antrim and across Northern Ireland would welcome this.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member has an extra minute if he chooses to use it. I remind him to address all remarks through the Chair.

Mr Lyons: I will, of course, and I agree with the Member. It is important to note that the figure of the 10 million passengers that would need to go through the airport has also been used. There are lots of other rail stations linked to airports across the country that do not have that sort of figure. Glasgow Prestwick Airport has 600,000; Southampton has 1.7 million; and Belfast International Airport has four million, which obviously does not include the other passengers that would use the line to travel between Lisburn and Antrim or elsewhere.

I used to be a frequent user of Newcastle International Airport, and the Tyne and Wear Metro from Newcastle and Sunderland goes right into the airport. I have seen the economic growth and development that came along that line as a result of it being there. As other Members mentioned, we should look not only at the number of passengers that could use it but at the other growth that could come along that line; not just the airport.

We want better connectivity. We also need to look at the truth that will come from all of this, which is that more people might use the airport because of the train line. People like the certainty of knowing that a train will come. With buses, people are sometimes not sure where to get them or where they will go, but rail is one of the easiest ways to travel. You have only to look at the transport statistics from Northern Ireland over the last 15 or 16 years to see that, in the first decade of this century, we had a 60% increase in the number of people using the railways. Even in the last three or four years, we have had a 30% increase. One of the reasons why that happened was an increase in investment in the railway lines in Northern Ireland. It is the same here. Like Mr Aiken said, if the investment is put in and you build it, people will use it.

12.45 pm

I understand that Minister Hazzard has an awful lot on his plate. There are competing groups and competing interests and priorities on his desk. However, it is important that, on such an important issue that has the potential to grow the accessibility of the International Airport and therefore grow our tourism potential, we at least explore the option of a rail link at the International Airport. Of course, an important thing to remember and realise is that the line is already there. We are not proposing a completely new construction here. It is there, but it is not being used. All that we are asking today is for the Minister to look into the feasibility of doing something with that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Gerry Mullan. I have to advise Mr Mullan that, because of the tight timescales involved in this debate and agreed by the Business Committee, I can allocate him only four minutes.

Mr Mullan: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. As a Member for the East Derry constituency, I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion, and I thank the proposer for bringing it to the Chamber. Rail connectivity is a major issue in my constituency. There have been some major advances in upgrading services, carriages and halts in recent times. Indeed, in June, I was

fortunate enough to be invited to attend the opening of the new Bellarena halt, which has provided a great boost for local rail passengers.

As outlined by my colleague from West Tyrone, the SDLP is in support of improving our rail infrastructure. A vital component of that is improving airport rail connectivity. Access to airports through direct rail linkages forms a vital part of any modern city or region, especially when you consider its importance in attracting foreign direct investment and boosting local tourism. In this regard, we have seen cities throughout Europe invest heavily in their airport rail connectivity. We will all have experienced this when we have travelled to the continent and even within these islands. For example, no sooner do you land at London Heathrow than you are navigating your way through London Underground. This is the hallmark of any modern city that prioritises connectivity that saves travellers both time and stress. It is something that we in the North of this island should prioritise.

Today's debate has been informative in highlighting the many issues that surround establishing a rail link to the International Airport, especially through the reopening of the Knockmore line. In spite of the political posturing that we have seen across the Chamber today, I think that we can agree that this is supported by the majority of Members, especially those in the Antrim constituencies.

Despite no feasibility study having been conducted, it is estimated that reopening the Knockmore line will cost upwards of £100 million. However, as my predecessor John Dallat highlighted in the last mandate, the Department for Regional Development had been spending vast sums on the maintenance of the 20-mile stretch of line from Antrim to Lisburn with little or no return. Therefore, I ask the Minister to detail how much his Department has spent on the line since it closed 13 years ago and where exactly the money has been spent. Surely that money would be put to better use if it were invested in a project that would see the permanent reopening of the Knockmore line. That would be a massive boost for travellers from not only Belfast city centre but across the North. This is especially the case when we consider the prospect of having a rail link from Derry to Dublin, a service that would allow people from my constituency of East Derry and from Foyle to be able to travel by rail rather than rely on buses that are inconvenient and inaccessible for many people.

Although today's motion focuses solely on the International Airport, the people of my constituency want to see greater rail connectivity to and from the City of Derry Airport in Eglinton, where the Derry to Belfast service runs adjacent to the airport yet no halt exists for airport passengers. The construction of a railway halt at Derry Airport has the potential to transform connectivity in the north-west, especially when we are attempting to attract record numbers of tourists into the area. It would not only serve the people of Derry city but could act as a gateway by connecting Castlerock, Downhill, Coleraine and Portstewart. There is also a possibility of constructing a railway halt at the Shackleton site in Ballykelly. I therefore ask the Minister what consideration he has given to the possibility of constructing a rail halt at the City of Derry Airport and whether he plans for his Department to conduct a feasibility study.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member's time is nearly up.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member recognise that the argument that he makes is somewhat weak?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Member's time is up and I am afraid that we have to conclude.

The Business Committee has agreed to meet at 1.00 pm today and 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. This debate will continue after Question Time, when the Minister will respond to the debate.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.50 pm.

On resuming (Mr Speaker in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Finance

Mr Speaker: We will start with listed questions.

Housing Associations

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Finance to outline the impact on public finances of the likely statistical reclassification of housing associations from private to public bodies by the Office of National Statistics. (AQO 206/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): Thank you, Mr Agnew. The outcome of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) review is expected shortly. While the result may be anticipated, we must await the formal notification and the detail of the ONS rationale before responding.

Any reclassification from the private to the public sector will affect how the bodies are treated in departmental budgets. Any new borrowing by them would require capital DEL budget cover and would therefore place a significant pressure on already constrained resources. I am working alongside the Communities Minister — in fact we met at 10.30 am today and this issue was very high on the agenda — and our officials are ensuring that we are ready to respond to the ONS decision.

I would add that we expect the reclassification decision to, as it were, go against us and to rule that housing associations are public-sector bodies. We expect that decision before the end of the month.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his answer. We had a debate in the Chamber yesterday about the need to invest in housing. My concern is that such a reclassification could inflict serious damage on our ability to invest, particularly in social housing. From his discussions with the Communities Minister, can the Minister tell us what contingency plans they hope to put in place?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you for that supplementary question. I share those concerns. Last week, I addressed the finance directors of all the housing associations, and you can be sure that they also impressed on me the urgency of getting it right.

I am content that we are on the right path. When the decision is issued, I will seek a derogation and the Treasury will decide how to respond to that based on the work we have done. I am content that that work will have the desired effect and that we will get a derogation to allow us to put the proper regulations or legislation in order. Therefore, while Mr Agnew is right to stress the issue and be vigilant on it, I hope and trust that we are on the right path. Mr Givan gave me much confidence in that regard this morning.

Mr Maskey: The Minister has already answered the question and said that he has met the Minister for Communities. Given his optimistic projections, will he give the House an assurance that he will continue to engage

with the Minister for Communities to make sure that the potential ramifications of the decision are minimised if not reduced altogether?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Go raibh maith agat, a Chomhalta. The Member is right to stress how grave it will be if we do not get it right. Needs must in that case, and if we were to lose the ability for housing associations to borrow off balance book it would cost the Executive up to £100 million a year. We do not have that type of money, yet we are resolved to hitting very ambitious social housing targets. For that reason, I take on board Members' concerns and am heartened by the response of Minister Givan and his team this morning.

UK Multi-year Budget

2. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Finance to outline any engagement he has had with HM Treasury to ascertain the current position on the previously anticipated multi-year budget for the United Kingdom. (AQO 207/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I have had a number of discussions with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the British Chancellor, Mr Hammond, on the EU referendum and its implications for the Executive's Budget. In addition, I have corresponded with them on a number of occasions on issues including the implications arising from the EU referendum. I continue to press for early engagement on the Budget implications in advance of the Chancellor's autumn statement, which will take place on November 23. I am pleased to say that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury has agreed to meet me on 24 October, which I think is a Monday. Shortly before that, we will meet Mr Hammond and, I believe, Theresa May.

I agree that it is essential that we have a clear path of communication with the Treasury on all these issues, especially in this period of uncertainty. My officials are in touch with the Treasury on a daily basis. It is fair to say, after our weekly meeting on EU issues this morning, that my officials believe that there is not enough information coming back from Westminster and the Treasury, but we can take some solace from the fact that, in Westminster, opposition parties are saying the same — they are not getting as much information as they would like. For our part — mine and my Department's — we remain on the ball on this issue.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister for his answer. I think that he shares my view that one-year Budgets should be avoided if at all possible, but we acknowledge that sometimes that is not possible. I ask the Minister, and I have raised this with him already, to take into particular consideration those in the third sector — the many thousands of community and other organisations relying on grant funding. For them, in particular, short-term one-year Budgets can be tough, especially when they have contracts and other things to extend and bills coming in. I therefore ask the Minister to continue to engage with the Department for Communities and to give a commitment to this House that he will try to get information out to them as soon as possible in this financial year to enable them to plan for the next financial year, if it is a one-year Budget.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Thank you for that supplementary question. Of course, you met me this morning as Chair of the Committee and made those points. I am very

cognisant of the pressures on those on the front line of providing services. We did not take the decision on a one-year Budget lightly. I am pleased that our Celtic cousins in Edinburgh and Cardiff are following the same route. That is because there is no alternative, insomuch as we do not know what the autumn statement will bring in terms of corporation tax, this entire fiscal reset and other issues. However, I take that on board. We will not know the full impact of the autumn statement on 23 November; it will probably take us a week or two to assess it and prepare a Budget. However, before Christmas we should have a one-year resource budget and four-year capital budget ready. I hope and trust that we can get the information to the bodies that need it as soon as possible. I take on board the broader point that stability around Budgets would be a great boon to all of us, and I hope to return to the House in more stable times and say, "Here is a resource budget that will bring us right up to 2020."

Budget Proposals

3. **Mrs Long** asked the Minister of Finance what are the implications of proposals to set a one-year rather than a three-year Budget. (AQO 208/16-21)

4. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Finance to outline any responses he has received from Executive colleagues on his proposal for a single-year budget instead of the previously suggested multi-year budget. (AQO 209/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, I will group questions 3 and 4 together.

A single-year resource DEL Budget will allow additional time to plan for the fiscal adjustments that the British Chancellor is expected to set out in the autumn statement. It will also provide further opportunity for our Departments to reflect upon resources that are required in future years to deliver Programme for Government priorities. A multi-year capital budget is possible — I am very pleased by that — in light of indications that a degree of protection will be afforded to capital budgets to encourage investment opportunities. A local multi-year capital budget will provide more certainty in planning capital projects. The First and deputy First Ministers have written to express their support for this approach to the Budget, and the indications from other Ministers have also been positive, with acknowledgement that, in the circumstances, it is a pragmatic way forward.

While Mrs Long is focusing on a one-year versus a multi-year Budget, I think she would agree that there is another pressure on us. Not only do we have to adopt this Budget because of the circumstances — the lack of information and the uncertainty from Westminster — but we face into the problem of resource between now and 2020: we have a 4.1% real-terms cut. Battling that and finding a way round it, when we have obligations in the form of pensions and pay, is very difficult and challenging for us all. I believe, however, that this is the correct way forward at this time.

Mrs Long: I thank the Minister for his answer. Obviously I recognise that there is uncertainty. How does the Minister intend to ensure that the Budget process at this point in the Assembly runs smoothly? It has often been beset by delay, and under a one-year Budget that could have significant implications for service providers. What discussions has the Minister had with Executive colleagues to address any potential delays down the line?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mrs Long for her supplementary question. The Executive have united around the concept of a one-year Budget because there is no alternative. Our Welsh and Scottish friends came to the same conclusion. The Executive realise that we have to move with some speed at this time.

There are bigger issues around the Budget, the complications of Budgets and the way that we do Budgets that I want to address in the time ahead. My officials will do a consultation with all the relevant sectors, including the trade unions, the third sector, the business sector and so on.

The Executive will be united around not only the concept of a one-year resource budget and a four-year capital budget but the commitment to make the Budget process as swift as possible. I am unhappy that we have to wait until December before we can bring forward a draft Budget. I wish that it were otherwise, but I understand that, given that it will be very late in the year, we need to move at pace in the new year to get the Budget through the House. I am confident that we can do that.

Mr Butler: Does the Minister not realise the sheer absurdity of the Executive pushing through a one-year Budget while trying to spin that they are almost at the finishing line of agreeing a five-year Programme for Government?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Let us see what the alternative is. If we were to agree with the Ulster Unionists that a one-year Budget is the wrong way forward, we would not be walking in lockstep with the devolved Administrations of Scotland and Wales. It has been my experience — I have met my fellow Ministers on several occasions — that, when we move together and speak for 10 million people with one voice, we make a better impression on the Treasury and better decisions for our people. The alternative would be, as the Ulster Unionists wanted us to do, to make a three-year Budget even though we do not know what Mr Hammond will do about corporation tax. Will he reduce it to 15%? Will he keep it at current levels? We do not know what Mr Hammond will do about his predecessor's resolve to raid our Budget in 2019-2020 and remove £150 million. I met the CBI yesterday morning for an hour-and-a-half discussion. Businesspeople understand that prudent Budget making necessitates taking tough decisions for the benefit of all our citizens. In this situation, the wrong and reckless decision would have been to press ahead with a three-year resource budget before Mr Hammond's statement or afterwards in that period of uncertainty.

The Programme for Government will be outcome-based. I am confident that the two processes will align and that the Executive — it is irrelevant now to consider mistakes made in the past by other Administrations — with an independent Justice Minister and with the DUP and Sinn Féin at the table, will make the right decisions for our people and create a Budget that sets out our priorities and meets the aspirations of our people.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for his explanations so far. We heard from Mrs Little Pengelly about the impact that this could have on the community and voluntary sector in its ability to plan, the amount of time that it will spend on applying for funding on an annual basis and the inefficiency of that; 20% of its time will be spent on applying for the next year rather than reducing that over a

longer term. When the Minister describes this as the best way forward, for whom is it the best way forward?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mr Agnew for that. There is no real logic to that at all. The logic of your position is that, if we had brought forward a Budget earlier or gone for a three-year Budget, we would have faced into massive uncertainties. We will not know until 23 November what Mr Hammond wishes to do or what he means when he says that he wants to reset the fiscal system and reboot his approach to public finances. We do not know what his approach is to the austerity agenda. In that context, the only sensible and prudent way forward, as is reflected in Scotland and Wales, is a one-year Budget.

We will engage with all those in receipt of public funds at an early stage. I will ask my colleagues on the Finance Committee to bring forward their thoughts on the Budget by October. The priority issue is to provide all those who depend on the Government with the funds that they need. While we can never satisfy all demand — demand is infinite and our resources are finite — I will endeavour with my colleagues across the way and the Minister of Justice to ensure that we can meet the maximum amount of requests from the public sector, the third sector and those who provide essential services to the community. I will endeavour to provide them with the moneys that they need. For me, Mr Agnew, that is where the focus should be.

I urge the Committee for Finance to look at this. Where are its priorities? Where would it like money to be spent? We have a year's Budget to lay out in that regard. I think that that is the area where I will work full out to try to ensure that we have a Budget that we are proud of, which delivers on the Programme for Government objectives and, more than that, delivers on our objective of a shared and prosperous society.

2.15 pm

NAMA/Project Eagle

5. **Mrs Barton** asked the Minister of Finance what contact he has had with the Minister for Finance in the Republic of Ireland regarding the National Asset Management Agency and Project Eagle. (AQO 210/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mrs Barton. I met Minister Noonan on 22 June 2016. It was a positive introductory meeting where we discussed a broad range of important issues including NAMA. The exact detail of our conversations at all these meetings remains private. However, Mrs Barton will know that my position for some time has been that there should be a commission of investigation on an all-island basis of the Project Eagle sale. She will also be aware of the position of Mr Noonan that any wrongdoing happened outside his jurisdiction. Needless to say, a Cheann Comhairle, I do not accept that position. Since June, things have moved on rapidly. The latest disturbing revelations by 'Spotlight' serve only to underline the need for a full and thoroughgoing investigation of the NAMA/Cerberus deal. In my view, the suggestion that these matters are relevant only to the North is not tenable, but I look forward to tomorrow. As Mrs Barton will know, the Comptroller and Auditor General in the South of Ireland has prepared a report on this particular issue. He will issue that. It will be discussed by Minister Noonan and his Cabinet colleagues. We will take it from there.

Mrs Barton: Thank you very much for your answer, Minister. Are you confident that proper due diligence was carried out on the appointment of Frank Cushnahan to NAMA's Northern Ireland advisory committee?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank Mrs Barton for that. If she has the time — you would need a lot of time for this — and she wants to go back over the Committee for Finance's investigation of the matter, she will see that, at the time, we expressed reservations about many issues around the Project Eagle sale deal preparation. I do not want to name individuals today. There will be enough of that, and it will probably happen at a higher court than this when it does happen. Whatever our misgivings about the conduct of the investigation, I think that we can stand over the conclusions of the report and investigation. One of them was that there are lessons to be learned. In my Department, we took those lessons on board. Where it is relevant and has been relevant to the Department of Finance, we have resolved that those mistakes should not be repeated. I suspect that the Minister for Finance in the South, Mr Noonan, and maybe the Taoiseach will touch on one of them tomorrow. This was the biggest-ever property deal since partition. It was our view across the table in the last Committee for Finance that we did not have on our side sufficient professionalism to gauge and understand what was happening. In the time ahead, if there were ever to be a sale of any asset of this size — I cannot actually imagine that there would be — we need to ensure that Government have on their side those who understand exactly what is going on. That is one of the lessons that my Department has taken on board.

Ms Hanna: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. In a previous answer, he referred to Executive unity. I think that the public are united in wanting to understand what did happen in the run-up to this deal. Will the Minister raise this at the next Executive meeting with a view to getting a united Executive commitment to a full, clear and transparent inquiry into the issue?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I think that the Member heard my position on the issue — it is not a new position — that there should be an all-Ireland inquiry. I do not know whether it was said in the House yesterday or on the TV earlier this week, but she will know the position of the First Minister. They are not the same positions. In my view, it would not be a sensible path to try to take an argument in the public domain into the Executive.

As Minister of Finance, I reiterate what I have said to Southern Ministers and to my colleagues here: a commission of investigation is needed so that we understand what happened and so that the mistakes do not happen again. It has been my view for some time that the sales process was flawed at its very core, and that, I think, will come out in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report.

What we need to do in the time ahead is ensure that those who can really bring justice to bear on the matter and bring to book those responsible for wrongdoing — the gardaí, the NCA, the FBI and the SEC — have the information to do their job. I remain hopeful. I do not know whether the Member was on the Finance Committee when we met the NCA. The information provided was confidential. You can be sure that it did not breach any of its protocols, but everything that the NCA promised us it would do, it has done. It outlined and road-mapped the stages of the

investigation, and it has delivered on that. It is therefore my hope that it has the evidence. I believe that there was wrongdoing. I do not want to speak about individuals, but I hope that the NCA is able to use the evidence that it has gathered to bring to a higher court than the Assembly those who were responsible for the scheme.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. I appreciate the Committee's desire for the Minister to step aside to allow an investigation to take place, but that has not happened. On the back of that, regarding the NCA's investigation, would that be right? What is the Minister's view on allowing that process to take place without political interference?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thought that you were going to ask me to step aside. I know that, of all the people in here, you would be the most disappointed if I did anything but step up, and step up is what I intend to do.

This is the sort of thing that you should not say in politics, because you are putting some trust in an organisation outwith this institution entirely, but I have faith in the NCA. They have delivered on their promises so far, and I believe that they will not need and will not brook any political interference in their affairs. Time will tell, Paul, if that is how things emerge. Of course, there are other jurisdictions' agencies now involved as well: the gardaí and the FBI.

Mr Ford: I must say that I am delighted to hear the Minister's support for the NCA, given the circumstances of its introduction here.

Given the significant public concern in the community about a range of issues involving NAMA — issues that are not just those for criminal investigation by the various agencies, North and South — given the potential difficulties of establishing an inquiry on a North/South basis and given the lack of confidence that the public would have in any inquiry conducted solely by the Assembly or any of its Committees, will the Minister give a commitment to have a full, independent inquiry in Northern Ireland if it is not possible to have one on a cross-border basis?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: There was every "given" in there except Paul Givan, I notice. What I would say to the former Minister is what he would have said to me in similar circumstances: unfortunately, I do not control the setting-up of inquiries in this jurisdiction. The Assembly may have the power to do that, or perhaps the Executive have the power, or perhaps it is the Comptroller and Auditor General.

I am as keen as he is to get to the truth of what happened in the Project Eagle deal. Much of the information that we are getting has come from sources outside any official investigation: in particular, we all have to tip our cap to the journalists who have been working on the issue.

I would not give up on the possibility of an all-island inquiry. I would like to see what Mr Noonan comes forward with tomorrow, and I am sure that Mr Ford would like to wait as well and see what the Comptroller and Auditor General points out as shortcomings. We know there has been some speculation that he or she will say that there is a shortfall of €200 million to €300 million because the deal was not carried out properly. Let us wait until that happens, when we see the report tomorrow. Let us see the response of Minister Noonan and the Taoiseach and take it from there.

I stand firm in my position that there should be that inquiry; I support your position. However, I would not give up on

the fact that, among the many givens, any commission of investigation set up by the Dáil or the Taoiseach or any individual appointed by the Taoiseach to scope it out will have the influence or ability to find out the information that they need north of the border.

Mr Allister: I totally accept that the Minister has no responsibility for what happened in his Department before he was Minister, but I have no doubt that he is concerned by the boasts in the 'Spotlight' programme from a gentleman who, while feathering his own nest, said that he had insider status in the Department and the opportunity to influence decisions in it. Has the Minister been able to investigate whether the integrity of the Department was breached in that respect and, if so, whether there was any staff complicity?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Mr Ford wants me to take on new powers, and Mr Allister wants me to be transported to the past. Let me tell Mr Allister what I have done since my appointment in relation to the NAMA Project Eagle deal. I have been in touch with the NCA and asked for my own meeting to make sure that they have the full cooperation of my Department, that there is no other information that they need and that I am kept aware of how the investigation is proceeding. We also did a forensic audit of all the information relating to NAMA that was in our files, and we ensured that any additional information could be handed over to the Committee and that the authorities had all the information. We were able to hand over some additional information, Mr Allister, without redactions. In my view, those were unimportant redactions, and we were able to remove some of them. Very few redactions were retained, mainly relating to data protection issues. We released the name of the third nominee from the former Minister to Minister Noonan for the NAMA advisory committee.

I stand over the integrity of the 3,100 staff in the Department of Finance. I believe that all those people, especially those who have been working on the issue, want to see the truth about the Project Eagle deal coming out. You can be assured that every member of my staff will, like me, cooperate fully with any inquiry. There will be no hidden corners, and no information will be held back. That is what I have done since my appointment, and we will continue that. My staff are equally committed to that end.

Sexual Orientation: 2021 Census

6. **Ms Seeley** asked the Minister of Finance whether the 2021 census will include a question on sexual orientation. (AQO 211/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Ba mhaith liom buíochas a thabhairt don Chomhalta as an cheist seo a chur. Last year, the statistics and research agency NISRA ran a consultation to assess what questions needed to be in the next census. Of the respondents who expressed an opinion, the vast majority indicated the need to have sexual identity data collected through the census. The NISRA response to the consultation was published in August, and research will now take place to test whether a sexual identity question could be included in the next census. That research will be completed by 2017-18, after which NISRA will publish the results and make a recommendation.

The census will be subject — this is the part that everyone else here likes — to the approval of the Assembly, which will provide the opportunity for full legislative scrutiny. I

am minded to include a question on sexual identity, but, as with all matters related to the census, we will need the buy-in of the Assembly and the Executive. The next Irish census will be in 2021, and I suspect that they may go in the same direction. At this stage, I am minded to include a question on sexual identity.

Ms Seeley: I thank the Minister for his response. Does he have awareness of the view of our LGBT groups in relation to having a sexual orientation question included in the census?

Mr Speaker: I ask the Minister to make his response quick.

Mr Ó Muilleoir: They are supportive. I met many of the groups at the Rainbow Project centre earlier this year, and they would like a question on sexual identity to be included in the census.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed question. We move on to topical questions.

NAMA Scandal

T1. **Mr McCrossan** asked the Minister of Finance, after thanking him for finally addressing the elephant in the room in relation to the NAMA scandal, by outlining that he is well aware of the many issues surrounding it, including the BBC 'Spotlight' allegations about a £40,000 fee to Frank Cushnahan and the report by the Comptroller and Auditor General in the South, which stated that the NAMA deal had irregularities and shortcomings, how confident he is that we will finally get to the bottom of this scandal that has literally shocked and sickened every single person who is watching this Chamber. (AQT 156/16-21)

2.30 pm

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. A lot of people are giving the Minister of Finance extra powers today and relying on me to do things that I am not empowered to do. I suggest to the Member that, rather than asking what my confidence is, he ask what is the confidence of the people of Ireland, North and South, and those further afield who were involved in the deal that we will get to the truth. We have to assume that people are confident. If they have trust in government and trust in the highest levels of business, law and accountancy, they have to be confident that we will get to the bottom of this scheme. If we do not, the upshot will be that we have let the people down. I personally am confident, and one of the reasons why I am confident is that I see, at every turn, people from all professions, not least from the political profession but also from the highest ranks of business, accountancy and law who think that it is incumbent on us and that it is essential that we do not let them down.

I will say only one other thing to Mr McCrossan. Neither he or nor I have seen the Comptroller and Auditor General's report, but it is my feeling at this stage that, while I am very much in favour of an all-island commission of investigation, it will be down to the FBI, the NCA and the gardaí, probably in that order. It will be down to the law enforcement agencies finally to unravel and pull back the cloak that has surrounded the NAMA/Cerberus deal.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for his answer so far. He highlighted public confidence. Is the Minister not concerned that, following the revelations surrounding a former party colleague and the alleged coaching of

a witness due to appear before the Assembly Finance Committee, any investigation undertaken by the House might be compromised due to political involvement? Is he not also concerned about the allegations linking him to the coaching of the witness concerned?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: No. You have moved from having confidence in the Minister's opinions to being concerned about the Minister's point of view on these matters. Let me assure Mr McCrossan that, when I come to work each morning and face the issues of balancing the Budget; of finding £4.6 billion to fund the health service; of making sure that our schools have the resources that they need; and of making sure that we are building, according to our plans, the art galleries, libraries and community centres that we need, the NAMA revelations about Jamie Bryson and Daithí McKay are very low on my totem pole.

It is worth stating again — I thank the Member for the opportunity — that I had no involvement in and no knowledge of the connections and communications between Mr McKay and the other individual, Mr Bryson. *[Interruption.]* Mr McCrossan has been here only a short while, so he should try to keep his manners in the House, and we will keep our manners with him. *[Interruption.]* He should also note that, while the Committee has asked whether I have any communication of any type that might shed light on the matter, I have not. I am happy to have the opportunity to put that on the record.

Let me say one other thing. When I hear the party of Conall McDevitt and Declan Boyle come here and lecture others about the ethics of politics, I am not concerned because I have confidence in the people and their ability to see behind party politicking. I also have confidence in the people and those who serve them to make sure that they will get the answers that they deserve on this matter.

Equal Pay: Executive Position

T2. **Mr Clarke** asked the Minister of Finance, given that there has been much talk about what the public think about various things, to outline the Executive's position on equal pay, in light of the section of the public, namely those who were involved with the PSNI and the justice agencies, who are concerned about equal pay. (AQT 157/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for his question. It leads to an issue that you never want to hear in politics, which is the moral obligation. There is a belief among many Members that there is a moral obligation that the equal pay settlement should have covered those who served in the PSNI and the NIO. Moral obligations sometimes do not make it into budgets because we do not have the resources that we would like to have, as the Member understands. It is my firm view that the responsibility for the issue lies with the NIO and the British Government. I have written to Mr Brokenshire, who was recently appointed to the position of Secretary of State, and have asked him to pick up his obligations in the matter. I am sympathetic to the plight of the individuals involved but I do not have the money in my budget and I cannot think of who I would take it from to serve this particular cohort. The NIO has the resources and a moral obligation to resolve the issue.

Mr Clarke: I welcome the fact that the Minister refers to a moral obligation and that he accepts that there is a moral obligation. Given that there was a paper prepared in 2015

to the Executive by the DUP, which does not seem to have gone anywhere, will the Minister give a reassurance that he will redouble his efforts to make sure that the moral commitment is realised by the NIO, or whoever the paymaster might be, so that these people can get justice on the equal pay issue?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am happy to keep the Member abreast of developments. Mr Brokenshire has not responded yet; he has only received that particular letter from us. It may require much persuasion or pressure. The Member's party has more sitting Members in another House than our party has, and they may have a role to play in this as well by putting pressure on the Treasury and Westminster.

Parking: Banbridge

T3. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Finance what progress has been made following the undertaking he gave after he and his colleagues met Banbridge Chamber of Commerce to discuss using the health centre grounds for parking. (AQT 158/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: For a minute, I thought that the Member was going to raise the vexed issue of rates, which we are always troubled and concerned about. I thank the Member for being present at a meeting with retailers from Banbridge in Gordons Chemists just outside the town some weeks back and for a run through of all the issues. The issue you highlight is that a government asset that is now redundant is not being used to provide some parking for the town centre. I have given a commitment to speak to the Health Minister, in whose estate that particular property sits. I will come back to you as soon as possible. It will take joined-up government — and you know how challenging that is for us — but I would like to think that we could resolve the issue regarding a car park that will help retailers in the centre of Banbridge.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for his response. I am very keen that the traders see that this Government are listening to their needs. Can you give an undertaking around timescales because Christmas is fast approaching and I know that they will require the parking for Christmas trading?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: If I were to say that I am going to speak to the Health Minister today, that might indicate that I have not spoken to her yet, so I want to be careful about that. I will make sure that, today, we talk to the Health Minister. The ball will be in her court — you can be sure she will bat it back — but I agree that it needs to be resolved and I will try to get it resolved.

Post-Brexit Budgets

T4. **Mrs Little Pengelly** asked the Minister of Finance, following this week's good example of toddler economics from the Ulster Unionist Party, with its "triple our funding but lower our taxes" cry to the British Government, whether he can, on a more realistic basis, outline the engagement he has had with Her Majesty's Treasury on the protection of our capital budget in the short term and an enhancement of that capital budget, particularly for infrastructure, in the light of the additional funds coming back that would otherwise have gone to Europe post-Brexit and the benefit to Northern Ireland from that. (AQT 159/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I thank the Member for her question. For the Treasury to have had that level of engagement with me would mean that they have been speaking to me more than they have been speaking to any of the other devolved Administrations, more than they are speaking to the Opposition and more than they are speaking to one another. Every time I turn on the TV, Mrs May, Mr Davis and Mr Fox are arguing with one another, not to mention Mr Boris Johnson.

You can take it that it is my contention that the British Government can do two things to help.

First, if there is going to be a fiscal reset in the autumn statement and a new approach to austerity, I hope that there will be additional investment in infrastructure. We will not reach the cloud cuckoo land of trebling infrastructure spend. I do not know which particular portal it was going to be transported to Earth from, but we are never going to have the money to treble infrastructure spend, as the Ulster Unionists seem to want. But, there could be a stimulus from Mr Hammond in the Autumn.

Secondly, he could take his foot off the austerity pedal. He could say, "We are not going to oblige you to have a 4.1% real-terms reduction between now and 2020". Regrettably, he has not brought me into his confidence, but we will be keeping the Treasury under pressure on those issues.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister for his response. Can he give a commitment that he will work with his Executive colleagues to look at a stimulus and encouraging business and economic growth here? He will be aware that infrastructure projects, unfortunately, take considerable time in what is referred to as the pipeline; it could be three, four or five years. Will he do everything in his power to ensure that resources and processes are fit for purpose to enable these projects to get shovel-ready and be ready to go when we get that certainty from Her Majesty's Treasury?

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As I know from my discussions with the business community — I have met maybe 15 or 16 different business organisations, chambers of commerce and so on — a surprising number of infrastructure projects are ready to go. They are not, perhaps, entirely over the line, with full planning permission, but when I meet with my ministerial colleagues, I find that there are projects sitting ready in each Department that they have had to hold back.

We have started a conversation in the Executive about creating our own stimulus locally, so whether it is through a stimulus of our own making or as a result of Mr Hammond's actions and the Barnett consequential, there is a series of projects that I would like to see realised. The South West College in Enniskillen was one of the most impressive visits that I have made since my appointment as Minister, and it is effectively ready to go. I think that would be a great project. Belfast City Council has a number of cultural projects close to the Ulster University that I would like to see happen, and there are some smaller game-changing projects, including an Cultúrlann in West Belfast that I would like to see happen as well.

In your own constituency, there is a little cycle and pedestrian bridge over the Lagan. I do not want to encourage you in baiting — never mind beating — the Ulster Unionists, but as you know, a previous Minister announced that cycle and pedestrian bridge, got full planning permission and then did not build it. If we had stimulus

here of our own making or as a consequence of a Barnett consequential and a decision by Mr Hammond, those are the sort of projects — much more than just a bridge over the Lagan — that we could bring forward swiftly.

Brexit: Minister of Finance's Position

T5. Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance whether, based on previous statements that he has made, not only in the House but on other occasions, it would be representing him correctly to say that, as of yet, he remains unconvinced of the merits of Brexit; and whether he accepts that he would be much better able to lead his Department from where we are than from where he would like us to be; that is, from a position of leaving the European Union. (AQT 160/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I admire your confidence; confidence has been used a lot here. The Buddhists have a great saying about living in the moment, so I always try and lead from the here and now and live in the moment. What I find amazing is that, regardless of Lord Morrow's certainty on this particular issue, the Tories in London cannot agree among themselves. Mr Davis said there was going to be a hard exit, a hard border; Mrs May, the Prime Minister, had to correct him. Liam Fox is busy insulting "fat and lazy" businesspeople, instead of preparing for the exit that you believe is coming.

I prefer to say, "Let's keep the options open", but, at the same time, we have set up in the Executive an inter-departmental group that is gathering information. It is gathering it without political interference, without "Remain" or "Leave" having any bias towards it. These matters will take some time to resolve, and Lord Morrow and I would both like to see a conclusion to this which is in the interest of all our people. I am a "Remainer". I will not call him a Brexiteer, but he certainly supports "Leave". The facts will become clear as time moves on. I think that he will agree that we need to get facts that are independent of political interference. Let us collect them in the middle, let the Executive take cognisance, and let us all take decisions based on those facts.

Mr Speaker: We do not have time for a supplementary question. We will now move on to questions to the Minister of Health. I will let the Minister of Health take her seat.

2.45 pm

Health

Learning Disability Underspend

1. Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health how she is addressing the underspend in learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 221/16-21)

Ms O'Neill (The Minister of Health): Since I first became aware of the issue, I have been closely monitoring the actions of the Western Trust, in particular its engagement with families and carers. Indeed, I wrote recently to the chief executive of the trust to make clear the seriousness with which I take the concerns that have been expressed to me by families and carers and to underline the need to

restore confidence by resolving the issue in a robust and transparent way.

While work to determine the extent of any underspend is ongoing, it is clear to all of us that urgent action is necessary in the shorter term. As part of this, the Western Trust has taken a number of steps to begin to address the issue, which include the development, in partnership with families, of a phased investment plan in adult learning disability services. In the immediate term, some £3 million is being invested to secure additional professional and support staff to enhance the community infrastructure in the Western Trust area and to address the priority needs of those transitioning into adult services by, among other things, increasing the day opportunities and day centre support.

In addition, I understand that the trust intends to develop an awareness programme and education sessions for families to continue to engage with MLAs and others as it progresses this crucial work.

I have also been assured that the trust will review how it communicates progress to all families affected, and this is something that I will continue to monitor very closely. While I think that we can all agree that all this progression is welcome, we cannot be complacent, and I have made clear my expectation that more needs to be done. A continuing commitment is required right across the system to ensure that we are delivering the right services for people with a learning disability and their families. Therefore, the trust will continue to develop a plan for further investments, working closely with the families and local representatives.

As I made clear during the Adjournment debate in June, and as these recent investments now demonstrate, I will not be found wanting in my support for people with a learning disability and their families. I am committed to working with the trust and others to ensure that the right services are in place, and I will continue to pay close attention to the progress that the trust is making.

Mr McCrossan: I thank the Minister for her answer, but she has not answered my question. Minister, it is now September, and we still have no figure for the shortfall, we still have no solutions, and we still have no explanation. What is the figure? What is the solution? What happened in the trust? Where has the money gone?

Mrs O'Neill: OK. I think that I did answer the question. Perhaps the Member was not listening. I very clearly set out what is happening across the trust. I very clearly set out that I took this up in my early days in office as a priority issue that I was concerned about. I very clearly set out how I have instructed the trust to engage better with families and carers. That is key for moving forward. There has been a breakdown of trust in the area, and that is totally unacceptable from the families and carers' point of view.

As we move forward, families are more interested in our finding a resolution to the issue than standing up and trying to do a bit of circus antics in the Chamber. It is far more important that I deliver better services — *[Interruption.]* — for all those people right across the Western Trust area, and I have set out how I have done and will do that. The amount of underspend, which goes back for many years, needs to be properly quantified. I have always said that. I said it in June. Work is going on in the board to make sure that that happens.

It is important that we do not throw more flame on the fire by trying to make headlines around figures. If it is £8 million, let us get to the bottom of it and address what has happened in the past. That is the work that I have been involved in. I have very clearly set out my stall by supporting the families in the Western Trust area. I have set out how the trust has been instructed to engage better, and I have written again to the chief executive in the last number of weeks because, in my experience and in my conversations with families, they do not feel that it has gone far enough. I am OK to take that on board and to engage with the trust to make sure that that happens. We need full transparency, trust to be built up again and proper supports on the ground. That is more important to families than trying to score petty political points off other Ministers.

Mr McCrossan: There is nothing petty about £8 million a year, Minister.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member not to barrack the Minister.

Mr Hussey: Like the previous contributor, I am not overly happy with the answer.

I met Mencap yesterday, and we discussed the problems associated with adults with learning disabilities in West Tyrone. The figure is not £8 million: we are possibly talking about £110 million or more that has been underspent in West Tyrone and the Western Health and Social Care Trust. You mentioned the trust in the Western Trust: well, there is no trust among the parents of children with learning disabilities. The question has to be whether the Department is taking this seriously. Is the Department going to make the chief executive accountable? So far, she has not been.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for his tone and his question. As I said to him in the Adjournment debate that he brought to the House, in my first couple of days in office, when the issue was brought to my attention, I very clearly involved myself with the issue. I have continued to push the trust around what it is doing, particularly around engagement with families, because that is key. There is such a big breakdown in trust here over many years that needs to be addressed. I want to make sure that I hold the trust to account in terms of what it is doing. In the last number of weeks, after speaking to families, I have again instructed it to look at how it engages with families. I do not think that it has gone far enough. Families are telling me that, so I want to address that.

We need to get to the bottom of the figure so people can quantify the amount of money and how long this underspend has been going on. We will get there. The board is actively working its way through that, but it is a difficult process. I am assured that we will get there. I will not stand behind; I will be very forthright in publishing that figure and making sure that families are aware of the figure. I will also be very sure to make strong guarantees about the investment of an additional £3 million that has been put in place to improve the picture. I do not want to wait until we have the final figure; I do not want to wait until that work is done. I want to make sure that we are already actively working on the ground and making changes. That is happening. We certainly have a way to go in building up trust, but I am committed to making sure that I play my role as Minister to make sure that happens.

Mr T Buchanan: I listened to what the Minister said, and she has set out what she plans or intends to do and

so forth. How do you intend to communicate that with the families on the ground? Any of the families that we talk to do not know anything of what is happening or what is taking place. How do you as Minister intend to communicate that to the families, to let them know that you are interested and that you are planning to do something about this?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member is probably aware that I have already met families, and I will continue to engage with families. It is a fact — I have met families and will continue to. I have received representations from many of the elected representatives in West Tyrone, you included, and I am happy to keep engaging to make sure that we put out the facts. I do not think that it is helpful to scaremonger. I think that there is a recognition right across the board that there is a problem — a problem that needs to be addressed. I will not be found wanting in my role in addressing that. I will not be found wanting in my role of holding the trust to account and making sure that it properly engages with families. Even when we quantify the figure, in going forward we have to make services better. We have to improve things for people with a learning disability, and the only way we can do that is proper communication. It is also about delivering and designing services and supports that actually meet the needs of people with learning disabilities, and I am very committed to making sure that in transforming and going forward we co-design all the services that are delivered for all those out there who need to avail themselves of health and social care.

Autism Assessments

2. Ms Bunting asked the Minister of Health, given the waiting list for clinical assessments in Belfast for conditions on the autism spectrum whether she plans to prioritise the clinical assessment of children on the waiting list who are at critical stages of their education. (AQO 222/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: All referrals to trusts for an autism assessment are prioritised on the basis of clinical need, not educational status. However, I am fully aware of the current waiting list position in the Belfast Trust and can assure the member that action is being taken to tackle the issue utilising the £2 million additional investment made available to all trusts from 1 April 2016. To be clear, I am committing to getting those waiting lists down and ensuring that children and young people are assessed as quickly as possible. In the immediate term, additional capacity for assessments has been secured from additional hours and overtime clinics. In addition, arrangements are being developed for the assessment of children in the Belfast Trust to be undertaken by other trusts. Further, a recruitment process is currently under way to fill six new posts that, when complete, will substantially improve waiting list management in the Belfast Trust. However, sustained improvements will require substantial reform. Therefore, in parallel to the actions that I have just set out, the HSC Board is also in the process of agreeing with the trusts a new regional model for autism services to improve both the diagnostic process and access to early intervention in line with current best practice and along with NICE guidelines. That new model will optimise the scope for the integration of child development, emotional and mental health services, as well as working more closely with the education sector, to ensure that

the provision of coordinated and appropriate support for children with autism is in place.

Ms Bunting: I am grateful to the Minister for her answer and the action that she intends to take. In East Belfast, parents are told that there is a 22-month wait for an assessment in the Bradbury Centre. They wait for seven months, then they check and are told that the wait is down but it is still 20 months. That is, realistically, a P6 child who is not going to be assessed until they are about to enter first year. I have parents who are at their wits' end.

I am sure that the Minister is sympathetic, but my question and, to some extent, my plea to her, while I appreciate the action that she intends to take and that she has outlined, is "How long can this go on?". If necessary, will she directly intervene to help, particularly the Bradbury Centre, alleviate the problems and address what are clearly enormous issues with regard to waiting lists and the prioritisation therein?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for that question. I totally agree with her. We can see that the situation in the Belfast Trust is obviously worse when it is compared with other trusts; there are particular issues there. I have set out how the trust itself intends to deliver. We need to move to the point where we are looking at a more regional service and a regional model approach. That would provide consistency across the board, not just for autism but for other disabilities. That will be key. I will keep a close eye on investment in the Belfast Trust and how it is trying to address the problems.

The fact that we have so many more people coming forward for referral shows that there is a lot of awareness now about autism. Look at the prevalence of autism over the last number of years: it has risen from 1.2% of the school-age population right up to 2.3% this year. That shows that there is obviously a growing demand. That is testimony to the great work that has been done on raising awareness. Families know that they can be referred, and they are seeking referral for assessment. That is really important.

The fact that we have a rise in the demand for autism services and supports means that we need to be continually tailoring the supports that are on offer. We have the autism strategy and plan in place, and they obviously need to be continually reviewed to make sure that we have services that are fit for purpose and meet the needs, in as timely a manner as possible, of all the children who need to be referred for assessment.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for her answers to date. She referred to the dire waiting lists in the Belfast area. Just last week, a distraught mother contacted me, Minister. She had just been told that her daughter had to wait up to 22 months for a diagnosis, with a possible further one-year wait for intervention. She is currently watching. What is your direct advice to her?

Mrs O'Neill: It is unacceptable that she has to wait that long. It is totally unacceptable that anybody has to wait that length of time, particularly for children to be referred for assessment in the first place, so that we can put a proper package in place to support them. I would not stand here for one minute — never, ever — and defend that type of waiting list, whether for autism services or any other supports for people who need health and social care. That is why we have to transform health and social care. We

cannot keep doing things the way we are doing them. That is why we need to move forward with the transformation piece. I look forward to engaging with all the parties in the House about how we seriously engage on how we will transform the delivery of health and social care services. We had the additional investment of £2 million right across all the trusts to try to deal with the backlogs that are there.

I would never stand here and say that it is acceptable that someone should have to wait that length of time. All I can say to that parent is that I will work night and day — I have done for the four months since I came into post — to make sure that I transform health and social care to deliver better outcomes for that child and every other child who needs health and social care.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for her very full reply. I ask her for a progress report on the autism strategy. What are the next steps?

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her question. As I said, there is a strategy in place that creates a statutory obligation to prepare, review and monitor the implementation of a cross-departmental strategy. That came about as a result of the Autism Act 2011. There are a number of themes right across the strategy, all of which are very relevant. We can all point to really good examples of things that have happened as a result of the strategy. We have more autism training for front-line staff, education professionals and youth workers. We have one-stop shops developed by the Northern Trust and Belfast Trust for adults to obtain employment and careers advice. Adjustments have been made to the theory and practical driving tests. We can point to a number of things as good examples.

3.00 pm

What I believe we need to do is to keep the strategy continually under review. It is important that it be cross-departmental in nature and has an action plan. In partnership with stakeholders and people out there who are involved with families and carers day and daily, we need to plug the gaps that are there. The way in which that can be done is by informing ourselves of the views of people with autism and those of their families, their carers and the community and voluntary groups that work with the sector.

Mr Lyttle: I wish to ask the Health Minister why there is a 22-month wait for autism assessments for children in Belfast, how exactly the £2 million investment has been spent and why that has not reduced waiting lists?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said earlier, the prevalence of autism in the school-age population is continuing to increase. If you compare the figures that I talked about and look at this year alone, you will see that there has been a 17% increase in the number of referrals for assessment. That is testimony to the work being done to raise awareness, with the result that people are more alert to the fact that autism exists and that they are entitled to get a referral for assessment. When you look at it, you can see that that in itself creates a demand for services. It is so important that we continue to review the strategy, make sure that we are fit for purpose and meet the need that is there.

There was and is good progress being made with the £2 million that was invested, but we have not got there yet — far from it, when you look at that waiting list. The Belfast Trust's share of the £2 million was £418,940, which paid for

a range of things, including staff overtime, but that is not a sustainable approach. We have to recruit. We have to make sure that we have ongoing recruitment and a proper workforce that can deliver the assessments that need to happen. I will continue to monitor the progress being made, but we seriously have a way to go. When I met Autism NI the other day, I committed to working more with the community and voluntary sector on the work that it does.

Looked-after Children

3. **Mr Maskey** asked the Minister of Health how she is addressing the needs of looked-after children. (AQO 223/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The term "looked-after children" (LAC) refers to a diverse group that varies in age, the reason for being looked after, the age of first entry into the care system and the duration in care. Although some looked-after children and young people can go on to enjoy success, as a group, outcomes, including health and education outcomes, tend to fall significantly below those of the general population.

In my term as Health Minister, I am determined to give those children and young people the priority that they deserve, in keeping with my duties as their corporate parent. I want a care system in which fewer children need to become looked after, in which quicker decisions are made about where they will live permanently and in which there are improved outcomes for each and every child in every area of their life, including physical, mental and emotional health and well-being and educational attainment. I also want to ensure that everything possible is done to secure their successful transition into adult life.

It is a commitment that I cannot deliver alone. I will need the help of the wider Executive, which, as is reflected in the draft Programme for Government, have also agreed to improve support for looked-after children. To deliver on the Programme for Government commitment, and in the context of the Executive's wider children's strategy, my Department is developing a strategy that is specific to looked-after children. The LAC strategy will be reinforced by a family support strategy, also being developed by my Department. Both strategies are being developed on a co-design basis, and we intend to consult on a draft LAC strategy and supporting action plan early next year. Where legislation is required to deliver any of our strategic aims for looked-after children, that will be done by way of an Adoption and Children Bill. I have already made public my intention to bring forward a Bill in the current mandate.

I want to ensure that looked-after children are given the opportunity to shape the strategy. Some of that will be done directly through me. I have already met a group of looked-after children in my time in office, and I am committed to ongoing engagement. I am also committed to providing Members with the opportunity to engage directly with looked-after children, and I am considering how that can be done to best effect. In their role as corporate parents, I have asked all five trusts to consider establishing formal engagement mechanisms to facilitate direct engagement with looked-after children in their area.

I accept that a looked-after children strategy may require some additional investment, either to test new ways of working or to extend existing supports available to looked-after children. I have already made a number of new investments. For example, I have invested £500,000 to extend the Going

the Extra Mile scheme to more young people in foster care to enable them to remain with their supported family until they reach the age of 21. I have also invested an additional £2 million in fostering services in response to service pressures and a further £150,000 to enhance therapeutic support for looked-after children, particularly those who have suffered or been exposed to trauma.

I thank the Member for his interest in the issue of looked-after children and recommend that other Members show a similar interest. I look forward to working with the Executive and the Assembly to support families in the North to stay together and to ensure that, when we make decisions to take children into care, we provide a system of care that nurtures them, acts in their best interests at all times and secures the best possible outcomes for them.

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

Mr Maskey: I thank the Minister for that very comprehensive response. I wanted to ask whether looked-after children are being engaged with, but, clearly, that is the case. Therefore, in the spirit in which she has already responded comprehensively, will she continue to update the House in future on the success of that engagement with looked-after children?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am very happy to do that. As I told the group of children that I met, they may be small in number but they are a high priority for the Executive and we want to deliver better outcomes for them, whether in health or in education or just in their feeling comfortable in their home environment. It is important that we talk to them. They clearly articulated to me what they feel needs to happen with services and how we support them. I am keen to continue that engagement, and, as I said, I have asked trusts to consider some sort of formal mechanism whereby they can engage with children in care in their areas. I am also going to try to provide an opportunity in the Assembly for MLAs to engage with children who find themselves in care.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for her answers to this point. Will she outline whether she intends to bring forward new adoption and fostering legislation to ensure that looked-after children are placed in a safe and caring environment rather than being kept in institutional care and other temporary care settings?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I intend to bring forward an Adoption and Children Bill. I have said publicly that I intend to bring a Bill to the Executive and put it out for consultation to make sure that we have the most efficient and robust possible legislation in place to support children who find themselves in that situation. The Bill will strengthen support mechanisms for those who are involved in adoption. I am keen to get Executive endorsement for that, and I will do that over the coming weeks.

Mr Bell: I thank the Minister for the work that her Department is doing for looked-after children. What is the current status of the educational gap that is emerging between looked-after children and the cohort of children in the general population? Secondly, will she assure the House that, where necessary, given that many of these children have experienced severe trauma and disruption to their lives and that there is such a short time to get it right, extra resources will be put into helping those looked-after children to achieve the life opportunities that many of us took for granted?

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely; that is what the strategy will be about. There will, obviously, be a cost factor associated with the strategy, but as I said, when I engaged with the group of children in care, they clearly set out the changes that they feel need to happen. I agree with them, but I have also committed to them that we will put proper legislation in place that will allow all those things to happen speedily. There should not be any delays in processes and in making sure that people are placed in proper homes and given every support possible. The facts speak for themselves when it comes to educational attainment, health outcomes, potential mental health problems and all those things that we know are relevant to children in care. It is so important that we support these young people on their life journey.

Ms Armstrong: Will the Minister confirm whether children being cared for by kith and kin will be considered formally in her Department's arrangements for looked-after children?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. We will take all that into consideration. It is important that we support that. There has been a lot of media focus and attention on kinship recently, and it is so important. The family support network is key, so it will all be considered.

Outpatient Waiting Lists

4. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Health how many outpatients in each health and social care trust have been waiting longer than 52 weeks for their first consultant-led appointment. (AQO 224/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The latest provisional figures for outpatients waiting longer than 52 weeks for their first consultant-led appointment show that, at 31 July 2016, the most recent figures available to me, there were 19,849 patients waiting in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, 1,698 patients in the Northern Trust, 4,689 patients in the South Eastern Trust, 3,278 patients in the Southern Trust and 4,104 patients in the Western Trust.

I wish to reiterate that tackling excessive waiting times is high on my agenda for delivering improvements in the health service. I want to assure patients and their families again that long waiting times are completely unacceptable to me and I that understand the worry and stress that people feel when they are waiting to hear when they will be seen.

To be able to deliver sustainable improvements in waiting times, we must take action that addresses the root causes of the problem. Short-term measures to address immediate pressures will, on their own, not be enough. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix. The position that I inherited in May was one of continuing deterioration in waiting times. It is just one of many challenges facing the health service here, and the need for change is very clear. As I said before, I will need time and new investment to deliver the radical change necessary to deliver sustained, long-term improvement. As I also said before, my policy will be to adopt a balanced approach to taking further short-term action when funding is available, combined with longer-term change.

I am considering the expert panel's report, which makes very clear the need for change. I look forward to setting out my vision for Health and Social Care over the next number

of weeks. That will include elective care waiting times. The health service here will continue to do its utmost within the resources it has available to ensure that the clinical needs of patients are met, patient safety is maintained and patients do not wait any longer than they have to.

Mr Nesbitt: If I heard the Minister correctly, it sounds as though something like 34,000 people in this small country are waiting more than 52 weeks for their first consultant-led appointment. The Minister will know that the longer patients are forced to wait for treatment, the more likely it is, unfortunately, that they will come to harm. Why is this unprecedented crisis escalating? Why is it getting worse?

Mrs O'Neill: There are a number of factors. We have an ageing population; people are living longer with more complex needs so need more supports. Individuals and patients' expectations have risen, and rightly so, and the demand for services is greater. If you refer to the question on autism and look at the numbers referred for assessment, you will see the rising demand for our health service.

The numbers also very clearly point to the reason why we need to transform Health and Social Care. We cannot keep doing things the same way and expect a different outcome. The only way we will be able to seriously address the issues and make the necessary investments is by reforming how we do things. The present situation cannot continue, as all parties recognised when they signed up to the principles in Professor Bengoa's report when he set out on his work with the expert panel.

If you look at all the factors that led to why we are in this situation, you will see that waiting lists are absolutely, 100%, totally unacceptable. We need to rectify that problem. I will certainly do that, and I have set out on a number of occasions to the House how I intend to do it in the short term, the medium term and the longer term.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Regardless of what the expert panel says, I do not think that we need an expert panel to tell us about the need for change. Nothing should make that clearer to us than these horrific figures. Is the Minister aware of individuals and families putting themselves in debt so that they can receive private care, given how long they are being told they will have to wait for these consultant-led appointments?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, I am. I am aware of many such people, even in my constituency. People turn that way because they cannot get access as quickly as they would like. That is why we have to transform how we deliver health and social care. Whilst there has been plenty of talk about it in the past, and report after report has pointed to the challenges in the health and social care system, we need real action and we need to deliver transformation. That is what I am committed to doing. I have set out my stall on how we need to deliver in the short term and the medium term, but the longer-term picture is about changing how we deliver services. We have to be real about delivering better outcomes for people, and the only way we will do that is to stop doing things the way we are doing them and to stop getting caught up in the black hole that is health. The Finance Minister could give me millions upon millions of pounds tomorrow, but I would not be prepared to invest that money to keep doing things the way we have been.

We need proper transformation, and we need real transformation. That will be my priority as Minister of Health. We have to deliver better outcomes, and the only

way we will do that is through such real and meaningful transformation. As I said, I look forward to all the parties in the House supporting me in that transformation and taking the difficult decisions that need to be made. That is the only way we will deliver better outcomes and the only way we can deliver to time frames that make sure that people do not wait ridiculous lengths of time for treatment and assessment. That will be a priority. I have set out many times how I intend to do that. It is certainly a priority for me.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Bengoa Report: Community Care

T1. **Ms S Bradley** asked the Minister of Health whether the Bengoa report will address the lack of provision of carers in the community. (AQT 166/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes. I have said that I am going to use the piece of work done by the expert panel as a foundation to drive forward the transformation. We have to look at everything. The focus has always been on the acute end of things and the acute services. We have to tackle the root causes of why people get sick. We have to be real about investment in primary care, and domiciliary care workers are obviously part of primary care. There are particular challenges around trying to recruit people to work in domiciliary care in rural areas. Hospital backlogs are created because people cannot be discharged from hospital because there is no care package in place. These are the things that we seriously need to address. The expert panel's work and my response to it, and my vision of transformation, will address how we are going to deal with social care.

Ms S Bradley: As the Minister rightly pointed out, there is a real shortage of care workers, particularly in rural areas. Organisations with good intentions are unable to provide the care packages required. Does the Minister have some way in which she is going to make sure that rural people in particular are not disadvantaged in their access to care packages at home?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, absolutely. That is going to be key. All the trusts employ so many domiciliary care workers in-house who are paid directly by the trust. They will also buy in so much domiciliary care service from the independent sector. That is not a good enough position. I want to see trusts employing more people in-house. Domiciliary care workers are the lowest-paid workers in the health service. Quite often, those who work for the independent sector will not get travel costs. They are expected to go onto every rural and country road to go and see people who need their support, but they are expected to do that without any mileage payment. That is not acceptable. If we want to provide better outcomes, support people closer to home and allow older people to stay in their homes and not have the need for residential care etc, we should be supporting the workforce to be there to do it all. That is certainly where I want to go. That is the direction of travel that I intend to take in making sure that we support domiciliary care workers, which, in turn, will obviously benefit the patient.

GPs: Out of Hours Services

T2. **Mr O'Dowd** asked the Minister of Health to outline the current picture with out of hours GP services across the North. (AQT 167/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: GP services and out of hours services are under significant pressure. The Department and the Health and Social Care Board have been working with out of hours providers right across the North to try to address the challenges that are facing the service. In 2015-16, an additional £3.1 million was made available to help build capacity in GP out of hours services, with a further £1.1 million made available to help out of hours providers meet the increased demand for services over winter months and the Easter period. There are significant challenges that we need to continually review and work our way through.

Mr O'Dowd: The Minister will be aware that there has been particular commentary on out of hours services provided in the Southern Trust area. Will she give further detail in regard to that area?

Mrs O'Neill: The Southern Health and Social Care Trust has been facing significant challenges in the provision of the out of hours service. As with the other out of hours providers, there is a number of reasons for that, including difficulties in recruiting and retaining GPs to maintain the provision. The Southern Health and Social Care Trust provides GP out of hours services from five bases: Armagh, Craigavon, Dungannon, Newry and Killeel. This configuration is intended to ensure that the vast majority of residents in that trust area have access to an out of hours base should a face-to-face appointment be required. There have been occasions when the Southern Trust has had an insufficient number of GPs and other staff available to deliver out of hours services from all of those five bases. In those circumstances, the trust continues to use contingency measures, which may require consolidating resources in the out of hours bases where patient demand is greatest. Patient safety has to be first and foremost in all those circumstances, and the trust takes that into account.

The Southern Trust also recently took a number of actions to support the out of hours service; for example, the introduction of nurse practitioners, clinical pharmacists to support GPs in managing the service, ongoing recruitment campaigns for GPs, the provision of additional funding to boost capacity at busy times, and supporting flexible shift hours and bases to work from. A body of work is being done, but there have clearly been particular challenges in the Southern Trust.

Cancer Strategy

T3. **Ms Lockhart** asked the Minister of Health, given that a recent visit to the research facilities in Belfast left Ms Lockhart quite taken with the fact that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom that does not have a cancer strategy, to outline her commitment to the drawing up of such a strategy. (AQT 168/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Meeting the challenges posed by cancer is a priority for me and will continue to be one of the highest priorities. I think we have made great strides in tackling cancer and there has been significant progress in the past decade since the cancer centre in Belfast City Hospital opened. We need to continue to drive forward continual progress, and I and my Department are

committed to working in partnership with others to provide the best cancer services that we can. The issue of a comprehensive cancer strategy has been raised with me and I am giving it some consideration. I attended an event that the Chair of the Committee hosted a few months ago, and I said that I would give it due consideration.

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Minister for that commitment. However, I would like to drive home to her the fact that I believe that Northern Ireland needs a comprehensive strategy — the terminology you use — to try to capture all the statistics and all the needs around cancer. I encourage and lobby you to give the House a clear commitment that you will work towards the commissioning of a cancer strategy in Northern Ireland.

Mrs O'Neill: I thank the Member for her comments and I will certainly take them on board. There appears to be growing demand for a comprehensive strategy, and, as I said, I have not ruled it out. Officials are currently engaged in a round of discussions with the community and voluntary sector and with the major charities that provide brilliant support and research. We are determining if any support could be provided from the community and voluntary sector if we decide that we need to progress a review here. I have not ruled it out and am certainly still open to the idea, but let us do a bit more homework on it.

Trade Union Engagement

T4. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Health whether she has engaged with union and staff representatives since becoming Minister. (AQT 169/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Yes, since I have taken up the post of Health Minister, I have made it very clear that I want to listen to and hear the views from the grass roots. Where I can, I want to make changes that reflect those ideas. I have had a number of meetings with trade unions since coming into office and have further introductory meetings lined up over the coming months to ensure that I have an opportunity to hear from all the staff representative bodies.

Mr Lynch: I welcome the meetings that the Minister has had. How will she continue to engage with staff, particularly in light of the upcoming transformation process?

Mrs O'Neill: It is so important, more so than ever before, that we continue to engage with trade unions, and it is so significantly important now given that we are about to embark on a process of transformation. I always say this genuinely and most people in the House will share the same sentiment: the best asset that we have in the health service is the workforce. It is so important that they are given ownership of the changes that we are trying to make and so important that they feel that they are listened to, because they are on the front line delivering services.

I recently established a new health partnership forum and I will personally chair the first meeting. This shows that I am really serious about engaging with trade union side. It is significant that we develop shared aims and a shared approach to how we bring forward transformation because transformation will mean change. It is so important that people understand why we are making changes and understand that it is not always about saving money but is genuinely about creating better outcomes for people. I think that the best way to do that is to make sure that there is wholesome engagement with the workforce at

every level. I intend to host the first meeting of the health partnership forum, which will bring together all the leaders across the Department and all the leaders from the trade union representation. That will be a major piece of work that is vital for me, particularly in trying to bring forward the transformation and to enable people to understand that we are doing it for the best reasons. It will also enable people to understand and take ownership of the process.

Accident and Emergency Coverage: Belfast

T5. Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Health to outline her plans to ensure adequate accident and emergency coverage throughout the city of Belfast. (AQT 170/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Obviously, the Belfast Trust leads on providing adequate services. It comes back to the conversation that runs through every question that I have answered today. We have to transform how we do things if we are to make sure that we have better outcomes for people and make sure that people are not sitting in A&E for a very long time. We have a lot of work to do on awareness and why people present in A&E in the first place. Is it the most appropriate place for them to go? Should they be at the minor injuries unit? We need to look at all those things in the round.

Belfast A&Es are obviously extremely busy. The staff there do excellent work and are very much challenged day and daily. We have to seriously transform how we deliver health and social care so that we do not have people who, quite frankly, sometimes present at A&E because they cannot get a GP appointment or have ongoing conditions and are on waiting lists to be seen.

Mr Stalford: I thank the Minister for her answer. Can she give us an update on how the services at the Royal's A&E are working as they take up the slack following the decision on A&E provision at the City Hospital?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have any details in relation to that. There is nothing on my desk that suggests that there is anything in particular for me to be worried about. I suppose that I will look into it and respond to the Member in writing, but I do not have any detail with me on any particular challenges or problems.

Breast Cancer Waiting Lists

T6. Mrs Little Pengelly asked the Minister of Health for an update on progress to ensure that people can see a specialist as soon as possible, given that she will be aware of the concerns being raised about the breast cancer waiting lists, particularly in the Belfast Trust area over the last 12 months, and in the light of a recent meeting with Action Cancer, a charity based in south Belfast that works across Northern Ireland, providing breast screening for approximately 11,000 people each year, which is a valuable service given the pressures on the Belfast Trust. (AQT 171/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Absolutely; I think that it is invaluable. What it does is amazing. It gets out, is on the ground, is in communities and meets people, and I think that that is really important.

The performance on breast cancer in the Belfast Trust is improving. The latest stats from July indicate that 87% of patients were seen within 14 days, but we obviously want to meet the target, which is 100% of patients being

seen within 14 days. It is an extremely worrying time for a woman who has been referred and needs to be assessed. There are a number of particular challenges in the Belfast Trust around radiologists and staff vacancies, and the trust is working on those to secure additional capacity to be able to deal with the cases that are referred.

In the longer term, there is a need to have a sustainable breast service in place across the North to make sure that patients are seen within the timescales that have been set out — the recommended 14 days. That is vital. That is when we can say that what we are doing is excellent.

Mrs Little Pengelly: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am sure that she will agree that those 11,000 screenings really alleviate a lot of pressure. Although it is not traditional for the Department of Health to fund third sector capital builds, there have been examples of that in the past with the Mencap new build, also in south Belfast, and the hospice. Can the Minister take it away and look at the issue? She may be aware that Action Cancer has purchased a building in order to expand its services, including breast screening. Are there any opportunities for potential funding, despite it not being the usual way that the Department of Health funds such projects, given that it has happened in the past with Mencap and the hospice?

Mrs O'Neill: OK, yes, I am happy to take it away, give it some consideration and see if there is a way. I totally support everything that you said about what Action Cancer does. It is absolutely amazing and reaches so many women. If I can be part of supporting that work, it will help me to deliver better outcomes for patients. That is something that we all want to work together on.

Actually, breast cancer survival rates here are excellent. We are leading the way, and we can be very proud of that. Quite often when we talk about health and social care everybody focuses on the negatives. It is sometimes important for us to sing loud about the good things that happen. There are many good things. There are many staff on the ground who provide excellent services and deliver better outcomes for people. It is important not to just focus on the negatives. Whilst we have to address the challenges that are there, we should also sing really loud about what is excellent in health and social care services.

Mr Speaker: Ms Nichola Mallon is not in her place. Ms Carál Ní Chuilín is not in her place. I call Ms Kellie Armstrong for a quick question.

Blue Badges

Ms Armstrong: I will be very quick, Mr Speaker. Thank you very much.

T9. Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Health whether she can confirm that people with blue badges can park at all hospitals and health centres and in any other car parks while their badge is out of date during the current backlog. (AQT 174/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am quite sure that they can, but I will clarify that. I cannot see any reason why that would be a problem.

Mr Speaker: Mr William Irwin is not in his place. That concludes topical questions —

Mr McCrossan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During the Finance Minister's answer to a question during Question Time, he made comments about a

former Member of the House and a current SDLP public representative.

I ask the Speaker to review those comments, to make a ruling on whether they were in order and, if he finds that they were not, to ask the Minister to withdraw his remarks and apologise in the Chamber.

3.30 pm

Mr Speaker: I have noted your comments.

Mr Maskey: Coincidentally, on the back of the last Member's contribution, I thank you, Mr Speaker, for admonishing Mr McCrossan for the manner in which he put his questions to Minister O'Neill. I felt that his tone was hectoring, bordering on bullying, and I do not think that the Member would want that as his reputation. I therefore ask you, Mr Speaker, to review the manner in which those questions were put and to have a conversation with Mr McCrossan to make him understand that Members should address colleagues in a certain manner in the Chamber.

Mr Speaker: I think that I have already dealt with that, Mr Maskey.

I invite Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

Private Members' Business

Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of competitiveness and availability of rail services between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to investigate all options for remedial action including the reintroduction of the Lisburn to Antrim rail link. — [Mr Girvan.]

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Infrastructure to respond to the debate. Minister Hazzard has 15 minutes.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I thank the Members on the Benches opposite for tabling the motion. As part of a small island off mainland Europe, we are entirely reliant on our airports and ports to access key markets and destinations, whether for pleasure, business, education or simply to visit family and friends. We are fairly unique in that regard, and that is reflected in the fact that we have significantly more air passengers relative to our population than anywhere else on these islands.

Mr Aiken: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Hazzard: I will indeed.

Mr Aiken: Minister, we will all in the Assembly note with concern Ryanair's announcement today that it is cutting the route from Stansted to City of Derry/Londonderry Airport, removing the route to Faro and reducing the service to Liverpool. I am sure that the Minister will now look closely at access to our airports and, maybe through the Northern Ireland Executive, push for issues relating to air passenger duty and access to airports, road and rail links to be addressed.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention, although it is not entirely relevant to the subject. Let the Member be under no misunderstanding — I suppose that it goes back to the motion — it is not that the Executive simply do not look at these issues. They are looked at regularly and are constantly under review. It is not the case that this is news out of the blue. I daily put our airports, ports and connectivity at the forefront of the agenda, and the Executive have them on their radar. Rest assured that there will be plenty of commentary about that specific issue over the next number of days. I hope that that reassures you.

While it is not the subject of today's motion, it is important to acknowledge that the connections that our airports and ports provide will be increasingly important in creating the conditions for prosperity and key to our ability to compete in a global, skills-based and innovative economy, not simply for markets but for investment and talent. Of course, it is not just the overseas connections from our airports and ports that are important. Connections to our airports and ports in the North are critical. For me, this is the core issue of today's motion, because, in tabling the motion, my colleagues are not seeking a rail link for its own sake;

it is about realising their ambitions and mine for improving access to our key gateways for all parts of the North.

Over recent years, the Assembly has supported the Executive in delivering a significant programme of investment that has aimed to enhance regional access, including to Belfast International Airport. That has included dual carriageway provision on the A4 west of Dungannon and the A1 around the south of Newry, as well as the widening of the M1 Westlink and M2. By enhancing access to Belfast International Airport, those have helped to reduce the time and cost of travel for businesses and communities across the North. I and my Executive colleagues are determined to continue to build on that. The Executive's commitment to deliver the £258 million upgrade of the A6 will address the historical underinvestment in that corridor and significantly enhance access to the International Airport from the north-west. Alongside the delivery of the A5, I see that as a key to unlocking the economic potential of the west and delivering on our ambitions for more balanced regional growth. Investing in our road infrastructure will not, however, do that on its own. It needs to be part of a more integrated package across government. It also needs to be accompanied by measures that enhance access to and promote the greater use of public transport, including for those accessing the airport.

The need to enhance connectivity, with a particular focus on increasing the numbers using public transport, is a key outcome in the Executive's draft Programme for Government. We have been very careful about how we have defined that because, ultimately, it is not about building roads or investing in rail and buses; it is about connecting people and opportunities. Achieving modal shift from the car to our bus or rail services for longer journeys and to walking or cycling for shorter journeys will reduce demand on the road network, which will allow it to work more efficiently, assist in the better movement of freight, reduce emissions and improve health by increasing levels of physical activity. It will also address key barriers to accessing social, employment and other opportunities for those who do not have access to a private vehicle. In that context, I am determined to continue to enhance public transport links to our airports, but it is important that we do so in a way that genuinely improves the opportunities available to those travelling to and from our airports.

There are a number of public transport options for those travelling to and from Belfast International Airport, including to the centre of Belfast. Those include the designated 300 bus service, which operates 50 times each day, seven days a week and with a frequency of 20 minutes at peak times. It is a reflection of the flexibility and quality of that service that, last year, it carried nearly 500,000 passengers between Belfast city centre and the airport. With a fast journey time of 30 minutes and high passenger numbers, it is not a wonder that Translink plans to invest in new double-decker vehicles for that route, adding passenger capacity.

In promoting the use of public transport and enhancing access, there appear to be obvious merits in introducing a rail link to the International Airport. However, it is estimated that annual passenger numbers to the International Airport would have to be around 10 million to make the service economically viable.

Mr Ford: I appreciate the Minister giving way. He has just highlighted the success of the 300 air-bus, which serves not just the airport but Templepatrick and Ballymartin, where a considerable number of passengers come from. In that context, when he is talking about the railway line, will he also talk about Ballinderry, Glenavy and Crumlin rather than just the airport?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his intervention. It has been discussed at length during the debate that it is not simply a rail link to the airport. However, when we are looking at the rail link, the figures are very much part of any feasibility analysis of how we go forward.

Last year, 4.4 million passengers used Belfast International Airport, which is an increase of almost 10% on the previous year. Passenger numbers are projected to continue to grow in the forthcoming years and are projected to exceed 10 million by approximately 2030. It is really only at that stage that we could realistically look at the potential to introduce a rail link to the airport. Extending a rail link to the International Airport would most likely involve the reopening of the Antrim to Knockmore line and the construction of a spur and rail halt close to the airport terminal. The cost of that has previously been estimated at anywhere between £50 million and £100 million. Even were passenger numbers at the airport to reach 10 million per year, the real benefits to passengers of introducing a rail link are likely to be limited. It is highly unlikely that rail could provide a more regular or more cost-effective link than that already provided by bus. Therefore, while I fully support the objective to enhance access to the International Airport, the provision of a rail link must be a longer-term objective.

In enhancing public transport access to the International Airport, my immediate priority will be to continue to invest in and support high-quality, frequent and affordable bus connections that meet passenger needs. I can assure Members that I remain committed to investment in our rail network. Indeed, the Executive have set aside funding for significant investment to complete phase 2 on the Derry to Coleraine line. They are also planning to develop new transport hubs in Belfast city centre and Derry at a cost of over £200 million. I will continue to make the case for investment in our rail network. My immediate priority for railway investment, however, is to maintain and improve passenger capacity on the existing network. That approach has delivered significant increases in passenger numbers on rail services in the recent past. As passenger numbers at the International Airport approach 10 million, I will wish to explore the opportunities to establish a rail link, but to do so well in advance is unlikely to offer real benefits to passengers or, indeed, the airport.

I will turn now to some of the specific points raised by Members. The possibility of establishing a rail freight hub at the International Airport was mentioned. It is thought that that would encourage the use of rail freight. No freight has been carried on local railways since 2003. Although there are benefits to moving freight off-road and on to rail, those can be realised only where they provide a cost-effective alternative to road. As a relatively small land mass with easy access to ports, road is generally more competitive for speed and flexibility.

Some Members raised the issue of the cost of maintaining the Knockmore to Antrim section of track. Since 2010, Translink has spent around £1.5 million on keeping that

section in its current condition. The benefit of that is that it enables Translink to use the track for staff training, as well as reducing the cost of any future reinstatement of services should the circumstances permit. The existing rail infrastructure passes close to George Best Belfast City Airport and the City of Derry Airport. Linking those airports directly by rail may not necessarily be the best way in which to serve the gateways through public transport. Translink provides frequent and popular bus services to both airports. My Department's priorities are to maintain and improve passenger capacity and to remove bottlenecks on the existing rail network. That does not preclude new halts where passenger demand justifies it and additional finance is attainable.

I have asked my officials to take note of the Hansard report of the debate. If I have not addressed any of the points raised by Members, I will correspond with them by way of response. In conclusion, I welcome the motion. I fully support the objective to enhance access to the International Airport. However, my immediate priority will be to continue to invest in and support high-quality, frequent and affordable bus connections that meet passenger needs. The provision of a rail link must be a longer-term objective and one that we will explore as annual passenger numbers at the airport approach 10 million. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Clarke: Minister, I start by saying that I welcome your comments at the start of your contribution. Obviously, I am pleased with most of the comments made by most of the Members in the Chamber and with those from my constituency colleague and one of your colleagues about the need for greater connectivity. However, I slightly despair at your closing comments and at the interjection by another colleague from South Antrim who referred to the other villages. As representatives of South Antrim, all of us were very familiar that the motion was geared directly towards the airport, yet we could see the benefit to the other villages, such as Glenavy, Stoneyford and Crumlin, and to Lagan Valley, everywhere else and beyond.

Most of your commentary has been based around the business case for 10 million passengers. Dare I say — I am usually quite rude with some officials — that DRD officials have got it wrong previously, as you know? As I reminded the Deputy Speaker earlier today in an interjection, the officials brought in services to do an estimate of the numbers using the line between Coleraine and Londonderry. When that line was realised, the projection was out by 225%. Mere desktop exercises do not demonstrate the yield of public transport use in the future. It is with that tone, Minister, that I am asking you to look at it again and to charge your officials with looking at it with fresh eyes, because communities such as Crumlin, Glenavy, Stoneyford and others are backed into a corner. The 300 service does not serve them whatsoever. The 300 service is a good service, but it connects only the airport to Belfast, not that particular area's hinterland. Indeed, even if it does, people have a considerable distance to travel to join the service.

3.45 pm

So, if they were to use the 300 service, it would probably be as easy for them to drive straight on to Belfast, rather than trying to catch the 300 bus. Some of us made representation to your Department recently to try to let

others use the 300 service, but Translink would not let other passengers in that area use it or provide a halt at the airport area in relation to Crooked Stone, which would have allowed the people in that hinterland right up as far as Nutts Corner to come down to get the 300 service. It is because the airport wants an express service from there, but it stops in Templepatrick.

Much has been said, Minister, about the benefits of this line. You spoke about the £1.5 million that has been spent. I suppose that that is not a huge amount of money from 2010. However, there would be much more benefit if we could see that line open again for the use of the people in that hinterland and, indeed, the airport.

My colleague who opened the debate talked about "build it and they will come". I believe that if we do build it, they will come. The testament to that is the example that was used for the Coleraine to Londonderry line. They had a very substandard service. I was on that train myself and felt that I would never get on it again because it felt unsafe. Now that they have built that railway line, their estimates have been blown completely out of the water — as I said, 225% over what they projected. What my colleague and others have presented today is that it is a case of build it and they will come.

I do not know how they could do a piece of work about the growth that there has been in Crumlin and Glenavy, as I dare say their populations have almost doubled, and those people are commuting. I am sure that you have the figure yourself, Minister, but an estimated 1,100 pupils leave Crumlin daily to go to other towns. Again, this railway line from Crumlin towards the airport would alleviate some of the problems in relation to the buses.

This is not only about the airport; this is about the connectivity between the villages and the airport itself. Steve Aiken gave us a four-minute speech on how successful the airport has been, and that is a good thing. You mentioned in your own remarks, Minister, about the growth of the airport, and that is something that we should all welcome. In its own right, it is capturing about 5.5 million of your 10 million passenger trigger. If you add that to the number of people outside that area who could use that line, you could easily surpass the 10 million figure.

Paul, my colleague for South Antrim, opened the debate. He spoke about the opportunity of an enterprise zone and how all these things fit together in the bigger picture. I listened to a debate on the radio the other day about an argument, I think it was in the 'News Letter', about there being one regional airport in Northern Ireland and whether there was a need for the other two. I think that that issue will come forward in the future.

Steve brought bad news today in relation to City of Derry Airport, and maybe that is the sort of news that we will hear more regularly. Belfast International has the right location. It is central in Northern Ireland, and we need as an Executive to do more to invest to assist it, and that will bring benefits to the wider area.

Whilst Jenny Palmer welcomed the motion, I was confused because she went on to criticise the fact that we were coming forward with an ambitious plan. Others welcomed ambition in what we are suggesting. Indeed, others added to that ambition. We heard about the Ulster Unionist Party's 10-point plan yesterday, which was mentioned a few times today, even in Question Time, and the three times the

investment in infrastructure but no suggestion of where that money will come from. It was a bit rich of them to criticise our plan, but if they had taken the time to read the motion they would have seen that we want to work with you, Minister, and your Department to bring this plan forward. The only way to deliver most things in Northern Ireland is by a partnership approach and everyone joining together.

Fra talked about the use of trains and how much cleaner and better they are for the environment. I suppose I will take that one because he is on our side in relation to that. I suppose the environment argument is a different one entirely, but there is an opportunity to create jobs. Fra talked about the creation of jobs if we could get more people off the roads and into trains to commute. It is a much easier and more reliable form of transport. I come in on the M2, and some mornings you do not know what to expect when you come to Sandyknowes, whether it will still be congested or otherwise.

Your Department has done a lot of work on the reliability of Translink, whether that be the buses or trains, which is another reason why this would work.

We had support from the west of the Province. Daniel McCrossan supported the connectivity, the opportunities for business and for stimulating economic growth.

We are hearing positivity from some parties. Although they are joined in opposition, they are not exactly on the same message. That is for them to sort out; the rest of us were on-message today.

We then heard from Kellie Armstrong, who, in a previous life, wore a different hat. Having worked in community transport, she will understand exactly the difficulties of isolated communities such as Glenavy and Crumlin, which sit on the edge and have no connectivity. I worked with Kellie in a previous life, and I welcome her comments about the importance of connecting our rural communities and getting them into hubs. I welcome the fact that she joined the rest of us in welcoming the idea of working with you, Minister, to map a way forward to get this ambitious project started and make it a reality.

We then heard from Edwin Poots, who was reminiscing a bit with my colleague from South Antrim Mr Ford on the work that they have been doing on this. I do not want to take away from that. The more we shout about this, the greater the opportunity of it becoming a reality. Mostly, they talked about the linkages to communities outside the greater airport area.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, my constituency colleague and your colleague Declan Kearney spoke next. I was very heartened by what Declan had to say about those isolated communities and what they need. He talked about a future enterprise zone. We are all coming at this from the same direction. We see the real benefits that it can deliver not only for South Antrim but for Northern Ireland. We see this as a gateway, and we see an airport better connected to Belfast. That is not to take away from the growth of the airport through additional flights, but, in the long term, if we had a better connection between the two locations, we could assist in that growth.

We heard from Alex Easton about the need for the best possible infrastructure, and I do not think that anyone could argue against that.

Steve was a bit more sceptical of Paul's view of "Build it and they will come", but I think that he then came on to our page. He turned from where he started and is now nearly championing the cause. I am glad that you have had that change of heart, Steve, and joined this train. We might need an extra carriage to get you to come along. Your later comments were welcome, and you are welcome with that view.

Gordon Lyons talked about the —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I ask the Member to bring his remarks to a close.

Mr Clarke: I will. The essence of what I want to say, Minister, is this: consider this as much as you can, but we want you to charge your officials with building it so that it will come.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of competitiveness and availability of rail services between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to investigate all options for remedial action including the reintroduction of the Lisburn to Antrim rail link.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Investing in Town Centres in Upper Bann

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes, and all other Members who are called to speak will have approximately five minutes.

Ms Seeley: I am proud to be from Upper Bann, which sits just 30 minutes outside Belfast. We have excellent rail links, although they could be improved if they were extended to Armagh; great access to the motorway; numerous booming industrial estates, with big names employing many; and many huge tourist attractions, including Oxford Island, the people's park, Lurgan park and Brownlow Castle. It truly is a place where we can work, live and play.

I want to take the opportunity to commend the businesswomen and businessmen of Upper Bann, who work tirelessly to contribute to our economy. Endless hours are spent, often simply making ends meet and surviving from one month to the next. Our bustling side streets with our independent retailers, butchers and veg shops are the heart and soul of our towns. There is nothing quite like the meat from Jim McCann's and Finty O'Hagan's, the fruit and veg from Hendersons, the unique gifts from Danann Crafts or the mouth-watering food from our bustling restaurant scene. I also want to commend the efforts of Banbridge and Portadown's chambers of commerce. The Finance Minister recently met Banbridge Chamber of Commerce and witnessed at first hand the sterling work that they do. Hopefully, he will accept an invitation to meet the Portadown Chamber of Commerce and representatives from Lurgan retailers in the coming months.

Finally, I want to praise the officers of Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. We have the second largest council in the North. I meet them regularly, as I am sure my colleagues from Upper Bann do. They work tirelessly to draw down funding and target it where it is needed most. They listen to and engage with our retailers and are developing a tourism strategy around our town centres. It is often their innovative ideas that breathe some life back into our town centres.

Sadly, however, that is not the reason that I rise in the Chamber today. I rise as a result of extensive lobbying during the recess from small and medium-sized businesses in our three town centres — Lurgan, Banbridge and Portadown — that are concerned for their future and the erosion of our town centres, despite the endless efforts of the many people I have mentioned. We are all too aware of the problems such as rates, lack of parking, decreased footfall, competition from shopping centres, the Northern Irish weather and more recently Brexit. Yet, town centres are the social centres of our constituencies. They offer people the opportunity to meet, talk and, more importantly, buy local produce. It is the very character of our town centres that gives our constituencies their identity.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Ms Seeley: I will indeed.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member state to the House exactly what effect the Brexit vote has had on the economies of the towns she has mentioned?

Ms Seeley: I will use a particular example of a trader in Lurgan who trades across the border and is worried that it will be impacted on by tariffs that traders may have to pay and that she will lose that business.

As I was saying, town centres are not competing on a level playing field, and they need our help. They are a significant part of our national and local economy and provide jobs, distribute goods and services and are a place of investment. This is investment that we cannot afford to let slip away. Our town centres are much too valuable to our economy and to our local community to be left to market forces alone. To see their contribution to the economy and society being steadily eroded is concerning, and we must do all in our power to reverse that decline. In the short term, that will, of course, require further investment, and I want to acknowledge the investment that this institution has given to our council over the years. The investment must go beyond the tidying-up of shop fronts; it will require forward and long-term thinking. For example, fragmentation is one of the key issues facing our town centres, and developing them on the basis that we develop our cities is a must, with restaurant quarters, market areas, a night-time economy, strong transport links and good Internet connections. We need to look at rates and how retailers can get more from them, with marketing initiatives — many have simply asked about their bins being lifted or about their water — and reduced rates for start-ups.

Councils should be duty-bound to employ full-time dedicated town centre managers to focus on marketing, increasing footfall and encouraging businesses and offices into our empty buildings. Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council has a business engagement programme, and during my time as a councillor I signposted many struggling businesses to that programme, which was often the difference between a business remaining open or closing its doors. That programme is now under threat as a result of funding pressures. Programmes such as that must become the norm. I call for a marketing strategy like the one deployed in Lisburn and online strategies such as Dungannon's Get Online campaign to be extended to the towns in Upper Bann.

I touched on the importance of a night-time economy: our towns should not be ghost towns as of 5.00 pm. From 5.00 pm to 8.00 pm is one of the few time slots for growth in town-centre footfall, yet our shops are closed. We must look at incentives to keep them open.

4.00 pm

We must bring derelict buildings back to life, not just by tidying them up but by encouraging traders, as well as offices, educational facilities and councils, into them. All of this will increase footfall throughout the day, supporting our businesses as more people buy local.

Some of the retailers I met during the summer recess complained that many of the successful and worthwhile Invest NI initiatives focus on manufacturing, exports and niche markets, but we must ensure that programmes are devised and aimed at supporting our retailers. None of this can be achieved in silos; we need a plan. We need regional government on a cross-departmental basis,

working with local government and working together with traders, to invest effectively in our town centres, bearing in mind that every town centre is different and unique.

Moving forward, I hope that phase 2 of the business improvement districts will include our towns in Upper Bann. I also call for the creation of retailer hubs, similar to the digital and innovation hubs that exist, as well as the further empowerment of our councils, particularly given their planning powers. Finally, we need targeted funding toward the development of our chambers of commerce, so that they can play a proactive role in the regeneration of our towns.

I thank Members for being here today and showing interest in this motion, and I thank the Minister for Communities for being here as well. Other Departments will need to be involved if we are to truly address the problem.

Mr Anderson: I welcome the opportunity to speak today about town centre investment in my constituency of Upper Bann. I have to declare an interest, as I have family involvement in a small business in Portadown. We have three main historic towns, Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge, and, more recently, we have seen the growth of Craigavon centre. Each plays an integral part in the local economy, but, since the economic downturn, many businesses and shops have struggled and ceased to exist. Our towns have had to adapt and develop to meet the demands of modern times. However, the economic downturn is not the only factor to affect businesses. The advancement of technology has meant that an ever-increasing number of people make more use of online shopping opportunities rather than shopping in the towns themselves, with the Consumer Council recently reporting that almost half of Northern Ireland consumers shop online. Our town centres have also had to compete for trade with an ever-growing out-of-town shopping network. As such, they have found it harder to make their mark and attract the same level of investment that was seen in years gone by.

Business rates have also proved challenging, with the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association recently noting that, in Northern Ireland, the level of vacant shops on the high street is nearly twice the UK national average. Whilst a number of efforts have recently been made by the local councils and the Executive to revitalise and regenerate town centres through the small business rate relief and support schemes, much more would need to be done to encourage investment and new start-ups in our town centres. With the introduction of the new councils across Northern Ireland, local government will have an increasing role to play in regeneration and economic development.

On a personal level, in my time as a member of the former Craigavon Borough Council, I chaired the economic development committee, which oversaw public realm schemes in Portadown and Lurgan, and work continues. Plus, there were other schemes that sought to help improve those two towns during difficult times. I and others appreciated that work at the time, although there were, perhaps, difficulties in getting the work done in time, but it has helped those towns, and it is imperative that collaborative work continues between all key sectors and levels of government to explore further ways in which town centre investment can be fostered and encouraged.

In recent weeks, we saw the Banbridge master plan launched by my colleague, the Minister for Communities, Paul Givan MLA. This sets out a clear vision and aim for

how the town centre will look over the next 15 years and incorporates a number of key regeneration proposals, including efforts to develop the evening economy and revitalisation projects to further enhance shop frontage and car parking.

I welcome the proposals, and I am hopeful that the master plan will provide additional opportunities for growth in the town centre. It is also important that we continue to help to drive investment in Portadown and Lurgan town centres, with efforts focused on developing the night-time economy and efforts being made to attract a range of different types of business that appeal to consumers.

Ultimately, the key to encouraging investment in our town centres is to continue to engage positively with the business sector to further drive investment and further encourage people to start businesses in our towns. Adopting a positive vision is key as we seek to identify good practice and to promote and advertise what our town centres have to offer not only in the local area but right across Northern Ireland. As we go forward, we need to continue to liaise with key stakeholders such as the chambers of commerce in each town, councils and Departments and Ministers on these matters in an effort to assist investment and to help to restore the town centres in Upper Bann.

As I said, Upper Bann's town centres have a great history and have much to offer, and it is vital that we all harness that potential in the years ahead. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

Mrs Dobson: I also thank the Member for securing the debate. At the outset, I will say that I will be the only Ulster Unionist contributing. My colleague Doug Beattie MC has asked me to give his apologies.

Investing in town centres is a crucial issue for economic stability and jobs right across Upper Bann, not only for Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge but for the smaller villages from Gilford to Loughbrickland and from Waringstown to Donaghcloney. The bottom line is that, whilst it is important to continue to invest, improve and innovate our town centres, it is equally important that the Executive fully support the small businesses that trade there. That requires a sea change in the silo mentality often adopted by Departments.

I will give one example. Last year saw investment in town centre public realm works on the one hand, whilst, on the other hand, small businesses suffered from a rating exercise, which was nothing short of a shambles. Thousands of small businesses, many of them family-owned for generations, rightly appealed, with many of those appeals eventually being upheld. For many of the dozens of small businesses for which I made representations to DFP last year, this often meant cancelling plans to expand their business or not taking on a new member of staff. Government must not give on the one hand and take away on the other. Investment in town centre infrastructure must, therefore, go hand in hand with packages of support that help small businesses to grow. Public realm works encourage businesses to invest, and the Executive must foster that investment and business growth to its full potential.

The fact that aspects of government policy impact on local families, whether they are business owners or employees, must never be forgotten. I very much welcome the action that has been taken to progress town centre public realm

works, including — I am sure that the Minister will refer to it later — the Banbridge master plan. I commend the Chamber of Commerce and especially Banbridge Regeneration Committee for their ongoing work and commitment to their communities. I am thinking particularly of the Banbridge plans when I say that I encourage the Minister to ensure that the local business community and residents have the full opportunity to have their say and their views listened to and taken on board.

If investment is to be successful, businesses and residents must feel ownership of change. I urge the Minister, when plans are being progressed by his Department, to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to benefit when it comes to initiatives like shopfront schemes, town centre Wi-Fi or public realm works. Positive changes that may have been a very long time coming should be allowed to have the maximum impact.

Again, I thank the Member for securing the debate, and I very much look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

Ms Lockhart: Like the Members who have already spoken, I want to give a wee outline of Upper Bann. As my colleague Sidney Anderson said, it has a unique mix of town centres — Lurgan, Banbridge, Portadown and the new town of Craigavon — all with their unique portfolio of retailers and the way in which they do business.

When I was thinking of this debate, I thought about each of the towns and their different needs. I was thinking about Lurgan, obviously, where my own office is based. We can look at the investment that there has been. At this stage, I thank the former Social Development Ministers and their staff. I also commend Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council — the ABC council — and I also thank the current Minister for his interest in the area.

Millennium Way is being progressed in Lurgan, and that is a great asset. I look forward to its completion, but there is still an elephant in the room with regard to rail and trying to get a solution to the railway halt issue. I am thankful, looking at the statistics, that Lurgan's vacancy rate has actually reduced. I think that is a positive step that shows that we are starting to get things working. It is important that we look at gap sites, such as Castle Lane and the Glendinning site, and at the entire area, and see where the council or this Assembly can invest in these sites.

In Portadown, there is a mix of family retailers and multinationals. There has been a significant amount of investment and work around the town quay — we welcome that, and it can be further explored. Look at the People's Park, and the investment there. There are still issues we need to look at, such as the barrier that Edward Street causes to the town; that is something that we can address.

Banbridge is a very vibrant town. Look at the statistics: believe it or not, Banbridge is actually one of the towns where vacancies have increased and that is worrying because Banbridge is always seen as a town that is bucking the trend. We need a very clear, concerted effort, maybe around a marketing strategy. We had the pleasure of having the Finance Minister in Banbridge very recently; the Communities Minister was there the day before. There was a master plan designed for Banbridge. I think that is very welcome, but I do not want it to be just a document — I want it to be a live document. I want to see the transportation strategy that the Minister committed to brought to fruition

and a concerted effort by the Executive to attract new businesses, because ultimately that is what we need.

We need new entrepreneurs to come into our town centres. We need to encourage people to shop local. I am an individual who loves shopping local. We have got to encourage that, whether or not it is a Stormont-led initiative around shopping local, as was suggested in Banbridge. That would be really welcome, and the traders would welcome it. I think they are crying out for a regional marketing strategy for town centres so that people feel town centres are open for business. We have a fantastic mix of family-run and -owned businesses that create a phenomenal amount of employment in each of our town centres. We really have to put our shoulders to the wheel and help these traders, who have through times of change stuck with the town centres and invested in them.

We need to tackle the rates issue. We know that the Finance Minister is bringing forward a review, and I ask him to take note of the representations that the businesses have made, particularly around the disparity between town centre and out of town. I encourage the Finance Minister to look at that, and also the rating of the charity sector.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member bring her remarks to a close?

Ms Lockhart: I look forward to exciting times for town centres, and I really look forward to the Minister informing us of exactly what he is doing. I want to commend the three town centres, because there has been over £11 million spent in them.

4.15 pm

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

Mr O'Dowd: Thank you, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I congratulate my colleague for bringing forward this topic for discussion. It is a mixture of good news and more challenges ahead, but, as many Members who have spoken have outlined, there has already been significant investment in town centres across Upper Bann over this last decade. In particular, Banbridge requires investment in its landscapes, footpaths etc. I believe that that investment can come about, and I welcome the interest shown by Minister Givan, who was at the recent launch of the Banbridge master plan. That is a sign that the Executive are working.

I also noted during Minister Givan's visit that he has funded a transportation infrastructure plan for Banbridge as well. I commented at the time that the Minister could have stood back and said, "That is not my problem. Go and see Minister Hazzard." It is a sign of the Executive working together to assist in bringing forward plans, in this case for town centres, which benefit the entire community. They benefit the town centres, which, in turn, benefits our economy.

Town centres have faced a number of challenges over this last 15 to 20 years. The introduction of out-of-town shopping was a significant challenge to the traditional town centre. Many of them failed to recover from out-of-town shopping centres being placed near them. I also think — I have said this directly to traders — that many of them spent too long debating what they did not have and what the out-of-town shopping centre did have, instead of focusing on the uniqueness of the town centre — the

family trader, the local produce and the unique produce that they were selling in their town centres. The envy of the out-of-town shopping centre has to end. They are here for the future; they are part of the make-up of our retail economy going into the future. Our town centres have to focus on the uniqueness of the brand that they can deliver and sell. There is a huge opportunity there.

The other big challenge has been the turn to Internet shopping. That has been a challenge for international retail organisations: how they deal with the changing trend of the consumer in relation to buying products over the Internet. Our town centres and small retail businesses are having difficulties keeping pace with that. Perhaps that is an area where we should be assisting our small and medium-sized businesses: how they engage with the Internet online sales market, use their small businesses and promote them online, engage with the customer online, forward products, etc. That will continue to be a significant part of retail in the future, and if our small and medium-sized businesses and town centres are to survive, they have to be as up-to-speed in selling their unique products online as the large retailer.

Much has been said about rates, and they are a challenge for small businesses. However, I will put this measure of caution for people. If you cut rates in one area, it means that there is a reduction in the rates coming into the Executive. The Executive already face huge financial challenges. I believe that there is scope within the small business rate relief scheme for a new approach, and the Finance Minister has already said that the scheme is under review. I think that there is scope for small businesses to make their case heard: who qualifies for the small business rate relief scheme, how long should that qualification last, what is its purpose and how does it promote the local economy?

There is a lot of work going on. As has already been noted, we have had Minister Givan, Minister Hazzard, and the Finance Minister in the Upper Bann over this last number of months. So, the Executive are paying attention to what is going on in the town centres in Upper Bann and, as Mrs Dobson mentioned, in some of the smaller villages — Gilford, Loughbrickland and others — in and around the vicinity. There are huge opportunities for the town centres of Upper Bann. There are challenges, but I believe that the Executive are listening. The local council is listening. Our role as elected representatives is to ensure that that engagement continues and that there is product at the end of that consultation. Thank you very much.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker. As the SDLP spokesperson on the economy, I am delighted to speak in this debate. Whilst it is specific to the Upper Bann constituency, as a Member representing South Down, I hear and recognise that many of the problems associated throughout Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown are reflected in towns such as Warrenpoint, Kilkeel, Downpatrick and right across my constituency.

They are not unique, although it has to be said that, like other constituencies, Upper Bann has its uniqueness. I suppose that, like everywhere, we have to work to our strengths and create a tailored approach to what will revive the high street in those areas. For example, I know that the council invests in Lurgan show. I have learnt that the public park there is the largest on the island after Phoenix Park. Such shows, although they are great and draw crowds, do not greatly benefit the high street. It is about creative

thinking and playing to the strengths of the area. I look again at Portadown. You have the Seagoe Hotel, at which many of us would look with envy —

Ms Lockhart: I thank the Member for giving way. I welcome your point about Lurgan show, the park and Brownlow House. Significant investment is needed to link them with the town centre. I welcome the council investment in Brownlow House, but I encourage the Executive to look at Brownlow House as well. You make a very valid point.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you.

I agree completely. I look with envy at hotels such as the Seagoe Hotel in Portadown. I also think of the industrial hub in Craigavon. Unfortunately, visitors to Seagoe often have to travel to hotels elsewhere at the end of their visit. We therefore have to look at hotels, connectivity of features that are already in place, how those can be built on and how they directly link to the high street. I know that my former colleague Dolores Kelly did much work on the rail service, for example. It is an important feature in creating access to towns and town centres.

I looked through the statistics on vacancy rates in Upper Bann. Of course, we would like them all to sit at 0%, and we should aim for nothing short of that, but there are rates of 20%, 25% and 27%. In real terms, that means that one in three or four shops has its shutter down. That image is not enticing potential customers to visit the town centre.

We have rightly identified reasons for that, such as changes in shopping habits, the growth of Internet shopping, the growth of out-of-town retailing, parking, traffic issues and infrastructure, including rail links, as I mentioned. The Government have to play their part in keeping our town centres vibrant, and stimulating the local economy will then play well into our regional and national economies. Our main streets and high streets play a significant role in the national economy. They are very much part of the bigger picture. The high street provides jobs, distributes goods and services and is a place of investment. We cannot afford to see that investment slip.

Mr Chambers: I thank the Member for giving way. Does she agree that, while the Department and the local authorities can do all that they can to improve town centres, the responsibility for a vibrant town centre lies with the residents? There is a big responsibility on residents to support local businesses. If they did that, there would be fewer shutters going down and more businesses coming into our town centres.

Ms S Bradley: Yes, I agree: we are all stakeholders. As the Member mentioned earlier, there are different sides to the argument, with people wanting support for one thing over another. We all have a part to play in this — you are absolutely right — but it is about making the high street enticing. Customers will not come unless there is an offer in place.

Looking at what is in the power of the House or the Government, I believe that investment must continue. We must look at why regeneration powers have not yet been handed over to council areas. The delay in devolving those powers is really unacceptable at this stage. The Regeneration Bill, which was not brought forward in the previous mandate, would have extended

powers to councils to address social need and to carry out regeneration schemes. That really undermines the reform of local government. Planning powers, community planning powers and regeneration powers go together and can play a greater role in sharpening up and regenerating our town centres. The SDLP is, again, calling for regeneration powers to be transferred to councils. Many councils previously drew down funds from OFMDFM to regenerate their town centres to encourage footfall, but we need to get past painting shutters to make shop fronts more attractive while they are closed. Business rates are within our gift —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member should bring her remarks to a close.

Ms S Bradley: — and I ask the Minister to carry out a thorough review of working with other Departments to make real, effective change.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member's time is up. I call the Minister.

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I thank Ms Seeley for the opportunity to speak this afternoon on town centres in Upper Bann, and I thank all those who contributed the debate. It is clear from the comments made that there are challenges there, but there has also been significant investment by my Department to date in the regeneration of areas in Upper Bann, namely Banbridge, central Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown. A number of Members highlighted the fact that I was in Banbridge last month. I was delighted to see my colleagues, Mr Anderson and Carla Lockhart, there, as well as John O'Dowd, who came along and engaged with me on the issues around Banbridge.

Urban regeneration and community development activities are designed to help to reverse economic, social and physical decline in areas where market forces will not do that without the support of government. I am committed to taking forward and delivering regeneration programmes that aim to tackle area-based deprivation, make our towns and cities more competitive, link up areas of need with areas of opportunity and develop more connected and engaged communities.

To make our towns more competitive, I firmly believe in the need to build the strongest possible framework for investment and business growth. My Department has led the development and publication of master plans for all the towns in Upper Bann. Those documents provide the strategic vision and future direction for all stakeholders who have an interest in the development of our towns and cities over the next 10 to 15 years. The plans seek to develop and promote the unique characteristics of each town.

Councils will also play a key role in taking responsibility for the development of their towns, and it is important that councils take the lead in driving forward investment and business growth in their district. My Department will play a full role working with councils on the implementation of community development powers and the progression of local development plans.

Upper Bann is strategically positioned in terms of access to major roads, airports and seaports. Government will need to work together to continue to improve the infrastructure to maximise the opportunities needed to improve and sustain access to markets. Investment is important to our economic development, because town centres are vital to the economic life of Northern

Ireland. Since 2008, my Department has directly invested approximately £10 million in regenerating the town centres of Banbridge, central Craigavon, Lurgan and Portadown. That has been matched with local government and private-sector investment of approximately £4.2 million. I suggest to Members that that investment is slightly more than just the shop-front paint job that was suggested earlier.

Towns face many challenges, not least from the increased competition that Internet shopping brings. That was highlighted by other Members: Mr O'Dowd and Mr Chambers touched on it. The changing way in which consumers go about their business is driving change in the retail sector. We need to assist businesses, particularly in town centres, to tap into that and respond to it. Ultimately, however, the consumer is king — or queen, for that matter — when deciding where they shop.

Mr O'Dowd rightly pointed out that out-of-town shopping centres are here to stay. I support my out-of-town centre at Sprucefield because of its strategic location in Northern Ireland. That presents a tension when it comes to town centre traders, but consumers ultimately dictate where they spend their money; government cannot do that. However, we can assist our businesses to present environments so that consumers will want to come into town centres. Fundamentally, it is our businesses that need to recognise the changing environment that they operate in.

I will seek to do all I can to help them to tap into that market and how it is developing.

4.30 pm

Projects have included major improvements to the public realm in Upper Bann. That is the fabric of our town centres. It provides the attractive shared spaces that residents and visitors can enjoy, and it supports local trade and enterprise. Lurgan and Portadown have benefited from multimillion-pound investments, making them more attractive and inviting to all. We have also delivered a number of revitalisation projects into which the traders and businesses in town centres had input so that we could provide a tailored package of initiatives to meet the needs of their town. Those initiatives included sprucing up shop frontages; provision of free Wi-Fi; new planters; shrouding derelict buildings; special events to promote the town centres; and landlord meetings, to name but a few. Local traders also recognise the benefit of those schemes, having invested their own money to improve the appeal of their business.

This has attracted commentary that the shop frontage schemes are somehow not worthwhile. I disagree, and private businesses putting in their own money as part of the schemes is testament to the fact that they are important when cosmetically improving an area. Suggesting that we only ever do revitalisation schemes does not present an accurate picture of how the Executive want to provide support through much greater investment, which we have been able to do in Upper Bann.

I am aware that the local traders often raise concerns about the need to introduce fairer rates and taxes in order to support existing businesses and attract new businesses to the town centres. The Finance Minister is looking into that. Let me assure the House that I will work with my colleagues to provide support to local traders. It is an issue raised with me by businesses in my constituency.

Some benefited in our town centre, and others were disadvantaged by the scheme that was carried out. It was rightly pointed out by Mr O'Dowd that rates have to be paid and have to be paid by someone. What is important is that we ensure that there is a fair and equitable way that the burden can be shared across society. That, of course, is always open to challenge, and rightly so.

I believe that the level of rent that landlords seek to extract from commercial enterprises is as much of an issue as rates. Northern Ireland has the lowest rates of anywhere in the United Kingdom. We have introduced small business rate relief schemes, and we have helped to keep down the level that people pay. Some councils have put rates up; others have kept theirs down. When it comes to how much landlords charge for rent, which was an issue in my constituency, they need to be challenged about being realistic about the rent that they receive for their properties. That issue needs to be addressed.

My Department has also supported the private sector to redevelop vacant and derelict sites through the urban development grant initiative. That scheme was reopened earlier this year, and there has been considerable interest across the Province, including the Upper Bann constituency. Upper Bann has one of the youngest populations in Northern Ireland. That helps to create the vibrant town centres, and investment in education programmes under the Department's neighbourhood renewal programme helps to support our young people to avail themselves of new and emerging opportunities. This year alone, my Department has invested over £1.5 million in three neighbourhood renewal areas in Upper Bann. The Department supports local jobs and local towns and has government offices in all the major towns in the constituency. Officials in Banbridge and Craigavon continue to work in close partnership with their council colleagues to deliver urban regeneration in the town centres of Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown. There is much physical evidence to attest to the success of that working partnership.

As I touched on, master plans have been developed. I launched the one for Banbridge recently, and already some of those initiatives have been identified and are progressing. Urban regeneration is fundamental to ensuring our town centres remain vital and viable, and that is why I am committed to continuing to invest in this area.

Finally, I will pick up on some points. It is vital that we seek to maximise existing opportunities to help to support town centres. We are looking to make future investment in Upper Bann, and Carla touched on that. The marketing strategy was mentioned by Ms Seeley, and such a strategy will be developed as part of the revitalisation scheme. There will be £2 million invested in Portadown over the next two years to take forward the linkages project, which will help to further improve the public realm, and there are other schemes too.

Let us take the opportunities to support our local businesses. Let us take the opportunity presented by Brexit. I know that Upper Bann voted to leave the European Union. You now have reduced sterling, which will attract people from the South to come in as trade has developed. There are opportunities that your area could be seeking when it comes to the lower sterling. Let us look at the opportunities —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Givan: Let us look at the opportunities, maximise those and work with our independent retailers in town centres to the benefit of everybody.

Adjourned at 4.35 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am about to make a statement. I will take any point of order after the statement.

Before we start this morning, it would be helpful to remind Members about some of our procedures. I appreciate that there are a number of issues at the moment that Members are keen to pursue through the Assembly, and I will defend their right to do that. However, there is also an onus on Members to use the right procedural routes. A number of Members sought to raise a Matter of the Day this morning that was clearly out of line with what Matters of the Day are intended to be used for. Rather than continuing to have the same problem every week, I advise Members to reacquaint themselves with the ruling issued by the then Speaker in 2008. It is very specific as to the types of issues that will and will not be accepted. I am considering reissuing a similar ruling myself to be helpful to Members, but, in the meantime, the 2008 ruling is the key basis on which these decisions are made. I will support Members in proactively exercising their scrutiny role, but I also have a responsibility to uphold our procedures.

Members will know that the Executive Office is up for questions today. It seems to me that topical questions were specifically designed for circumstances to allow Members the flexibility to raise issues that have arisen since the Order Paper was agreed. However, I also say to Members that scrutiny is not all about raising issues in the Chamber on the day.

Effective scrutiny is about Members using the variety of means at their disposal.

Finally, there are a number of new dynamics in the Assembly in this mandate, and there might be issues for us to look at in the future. One thing that has not changed is the authority of the Speaker under Standing Orders. My decisions are no more open to challenge or debate than those of my predecessors, nor do I intend to allow Members to try to draw me, as Speaker, into areas of party-political debate. However, if Members use our procedures, as they are, to pursue issues as vigorously as they like, they will have no issue with me. Let us move on.

Mrs Long: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is the point of order on the matter that I have just referred to?

Mrs Long: Yes, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I am taking no points of order on that matter.

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Is the point of order on the matter that I have referred to?

Mr Allister: It is on the processes of the House.

Mr Speaker: I am taking no points of order on the processes of the House. I have made my intentions quite clear. Let us move on.

Mr Allister: To explain, Mr Speaker, it is about you as the guardian of the processes of the House and whether you think that it is appropriate that prerogative powers —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member —

Mr Allister: — should be used to upstage the House —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member —

Mr Allister: — when making legislation.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to take his seat. Let us move on.

Public Petition: Cancer Drugs

Mr Speaker: Ms Paula Bradshaw has sought leave to present a public petition in accordance with Standing Order 22. The Member will have up to three minutes to speak.

Ms Bradshaw: I am pleased to bring the issue to the urgent attention of the Assembly. I am also thankful that the Health Minister is in attendance.

Everyone in the Chamber will at least know someone close to them who has been affected by cancer. Everyone in the Chamber knows the difficulty and stress that it can cause to families, family circles, workplaces and people in every walk of life. We cannot, therefore, fail to be aware of the crushing unfairness of denying access to drugs for people who are going through all that. At the precise time that the health service should be on their side, when they have paid the same taxes and National Insurance as everyone else in the UK, people in Northern Ireland find themselves at a blatant disadvantage purely because of where they live. Far from being helped out, they find yet another obstacle placed in their way.

The position of people living in one part of the UK having access to life-enhancing drugs while people living in another do not is indefensible and has gone on for far too long. It is a basic principle: we pay in the same, we should get the same out. The system is unequal and unjust. Small wonder that the petition that I am submitting today on behalf of the campaign struck such a chord with the public.

Let us not be diverted by any notion that money may be an issue. Health Ministers can always find allocations of tens of millions of pounds for various things when elections are on the horizon. Indeed, we found millions of pounds in the summer, without a business case, to subsidise an airline and, just this morning, we found millions of pounds to prop up a regional airport. Whatever the rights or wrongs of those decisions, the fact is that the budget required to deliver equal access to drugs is but a drop in the ocean in the overall Health and Social Care budget. As so often, it is not merely about money but about the system.

Let me say a word about Melanie Kennedy, who has been working on the petition. That remarkable woman, frankly, could have worked around the system; she could have perhaps taken a friend's address in England or such like. However, recognising the injustice and determined to fight for others as well as for herself, at risk to her own health, she campaigned for what is right. If anyone deserves a successful outcome it is her. The courage of many other campaigners like Melanie, so many of whom are undergoing treatment for cancer or who have people close to them who are, is also remarkable. They are too numerous to mention.

We call on the Minister to look again at the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's guidance on access to those drugs. We would like her to make that a top priority for the Department of Health.

Ms Bradshaw moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will send a copy of the petition to the Minister of Health, and a copy also to the Committee for Health.

Executive Committee Business

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill: First Stage

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I beg to introduce the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill, which is a Bill to make provision about liquor licensing and the registration of clubs.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Private Members' Business

'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU'

Mr 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 to wind up the debate. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Aiken: I beg to move

That this Assembly, in the light of the referendum decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, endorses and adopts the approach contained in 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU', published by the Ulster Unionist Party.

It is nearly three months since the referendum that resulted in the people of the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union. We as a party are conscious that the people of Northern Ireland and Scotland voted to remain in the EU — the position that we, on balance, campaigned for — but we accept that the vote taken will result in the United Kingdom triggering article 50 in the near future, possibly as early as January 2017. We have asked for this debate because we, as a responsible Opposition, wish to encourage our Government to action — any action. We have listened closely to civil society, business groups, agriculture, the university sector, the travel industry and, above all, the people of Northern Ireland, who have asked us, time and again, what is being done and what is the plan.

We note that, across the UK, the other regional Governments have already embarked on action. In Scotland, we have seen the formation of a Scottish standing council on Europe and a £100 million stimulus package. The Government there have already taken a proactive approach to getting the best deal for the Scottish people. In Wales, a similar approach is being taken, and the English regions and the city of London have been taking part in detailed discussions with Whitehall. Plans have been published, meetings are taking place and all these regions have defined what the impact of the loss of the EU means to them.

What have the Northern Ireland Executive done? They sent a letter to the Prime Minister on 10 August containing what to many, if not all of us, was a statement of the blindingly obvious. Our Executive met the Brexit Minister — separately. Our European office in Brussels has set up more teleconferences. Our civil servants — at least some of them — are talking to one another. Oh, and we have the ear of Liam Fox. That, unfortunately, is about it.

Embarrassingly for a devolved Government, the Secretary of State has done more: he has established an advisory panel, held talks with our nearest EU neighbour and held a wide series of meetings with key stakeholders. He has regular chats with the PM and the "naughty trio" — all of which is a damning commentary on our dysfunctional non-Government. I imagine that David Davis was laughing all the way back to Whitehall, and probably still is.

A blank sheet of A4, unfortunately, is a good representation of what has been achieved so far, and our people continue to ask, "What is the plan?". There are no public discussions —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Aiken: Not yet.

There are no public discussions, debates or grand committees, or even an understanding of the scale of the issues involved. Instead, we have a divided Government, pretending to give a facade of unity but still with no proposals or plans. That is why, in the vacuum that is the Government's response to the most significant event to affect our country in over 20 years, we had to take the lead and to publish our vision.

We recognise that, in Northern Ireland, our fellow Opposition party, half of the Government, the Alliance Party and the Green Party still hope that the decision to leave can be halted by the courts.

While the Ulster Unionist Party recommended remaining, we acknowledge that we must now accept the democratic wish expressed by the people to leave the European Union.

12.15 pm

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. I am sure that, in acknowledging all those who advocate what he advocates, he will be quick to mention that 85% of unionists voted against staying in the European Union. No doubt you will come to that.

Mr Aiken: Thank you for that.

As a responsible Opposition, we now offer a vision and a set of key asks to help prepare Northern Ireland for the forthcoming challenges and potential opportunities ahead. It is also useful at this stage to state what those challenges are likely to be. Indeed, as the Member for South Belfast so regularly and graciously points out, we have not yet fallen off the economic cliff into recession. It is good to note that the early action of the Bank of England, which pumped —

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Aiken: Not quite yet.

It pumped £250 billion of quantitative easing — *[Interruption.]* — we are answering your question — into the economy, which staved off the immediate crisis. That was done by adding a quarter of a trillion to our national debt, which is a moot point. However, according to the 'Northern Ireland Economic Outlook' that was published by PwC this week, growth in Northern Ireland for 2016 is forecast to be 1.2% and is expected to slump even further to 0.3% in 2017. That is worse than the overall UK rates, which are expected to remain at 1.8% in 2016 before dropping to 0.7% in 2017. As the learned members of the Government are or should be fully aware, broad economic modelling of our economy shows that Northern Ireland GDP normally lags around 1% behind that of GB.

We as a party do not want to be accused of doing Northern Ireland down, but, instead of sticking our collective head in the sand, we need to face the reality of what is likely to occur. For a start, we are ill prepared as it is, without facing a shortfall of £500 million — perhaps closer to £1 billion — per annum in post-exit funding. We sell Northern Ireland as a great place to do business, which it can be, by pointing out that we have a highly skilled workforce, while conveniently forgetting that most CFOs read the 'Financial Times' and Bloomberg, and, when they do due diligence, which is something that at least half our Government have

a problem with, they discover that our universities are underfunded to the tune of £55 million and are dropping like stones in the global rankings. We export 38% of our brightest youngsters per annum. We have the second highest costs of energy in western Europe. We have appalling infrastructure. Now, we have no plan for Brexit.

Rather than being negative — *[Laughter.]* — we need to build a more positive vision. The border between two great economic groupings can provide considerable economic potential. We have a strong case, if made properly, to become an enterprise zone that could harmonise EU/UK trading positions. It was good to see — unfortunately, he is not here — the DUP Chief Whip's support for an enterprise zone around our great International Airport last week and Mervyn Storey's continued support for the enterprise zone in North Antrim. It is an idea that needs to be explored, and it already has the support of many business groups here.

We would also use any stimulus package to build up our infrastructure, an approach already being taken across the UK, except, of course, here. We should invest heavily in R&D, again using the borrowing potential created by large-scale quantitative easing. I can already hear the harping: "You've always complained about creating more debt" and, through the Executive's new spin doctor, "Is the money coming from the magic money tree?". Well, guess what? After the referendum, we are in an entirely new dynamic. The so-called £350-million-a-week tsunami and the so-called savings from our EU contribution are not going to go far. New ideas about funding will be needed, many of which will involve QE going to infrastructure, potentially through long-term infrastructure bonds, which are being discussed across the UK but, again, unfortunately, not here.

It is not about just economics. We have had a troubled and uncertain history with the Republic of Ireland that has been changed to a positive and growing relationship that has been hard-earned. We can, with sufficient imagination and will, create a dynamic that prevents hard borders in Newry or Cairnryan. Achieving those goals will help us, as proud unionists, maintain the United Kingdom in a manner that avoids our proud nation slipping into xenophobia and isolationism.

You also hear from at least 50% of our Government that it is too early to begin planning because article 50 has not been triggered, they have a special relationship with Downing Street, things are not so bad or the falling pound has significantly improved our economy and the manufacturing sector is strong. Consider the record over the last nine years of Sinn Féin/DUP majority government and consider whether they are ready to get the best deal for Northern Ireland or even whether they have a plan.

We ask the Assembly to endorse and adopt the approach in 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the EU' because, frankly, the people of Northern Ireland deserve a plan and the consideration of our Government to doing something. Our vision is the best and only framework to achieve that.

Mr Stalford: It is always a pleasure to follow the Member for South Antrim, for his contributions are always so entertaining. He denigrates the Government of Northern Ireland who have served for the last nine years, whilst, of course, conveniently glossing over the fact that the party he is a member of served in the same Government for that period. If he is saying that the Government failed to deliver, he must take responsibility at least for the Ulster Unionist

Party's portion of their failure to deliver. A little less of the revision of history would be more welcome from the Ulster Unionist spokesperson.

Any old Opposition can produce uncosted plans: having a costed and sensible plan is the action of a Government-in-waiting. This is no Government-in-waiting. What we have seen from our friends since they published their document are largely uncosted, untested ideas that they know they will not be able to pay for. They know that the resource is not there. During the contribution from Mr Aiken, he referred to quantitative easing, so we are just going to print more money. Just print more money to pay for their ideas: that is the extent of the ambition of the Ulster Unionist Party's "vision".

Since the referendum, we have witnessed from those on the "Remain" side of the campaign a public display of the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and, finally, acceptance. I welcome the fact that Mr Aiken has been dragged kicking and screaming to the final stage: acceptance. I wish the same could be said for the other opposition parties because there seems to be opposition within the Opposition to accepting the outcome of the result. I do not really know what stage some of our more enthusiastic Europhile friends are at. Some are still in denial. Some are very angry, largely with the people who beat them in the argument during the campaign. Some are trying to bargain by saying, "Well, maybe article 50 will not be triggered", "Maybe this will happen" and "Maybe that will happen". Some have reached depression, and some will eventually — finally — have to reach acceptance of the decision that was taken by the people of the United Kingdom as a whole in the referendum. The sooner we get to that point, the better it will be. All parties, including those that were on the "Remain" side in the referendum, have a role to play to ensure that Northern Ireland secures the best possible outcome. That is what a responsible Government are doing, and it is what a responsible Opposition should be about.

Unfortunately, we have not seen that in the vision that has been offered to us by the Ulster Unionist Party. The truth of the matter, Mr Aiken tells us, is that his party recommended "Remain". It is true to say it did. It is true to say that the leadership of his party did. I suggest to Mr Aiken that he should take a straw poll of his colleagues sitting round him at the bottom of the Chamber. He should take a straw poll of Ulster Unionist councillors around Northern Ireland. He should take a straw poll of the members and voters who voted for the Ulster Unionist Party in recent elections. I think he would find that not only within unionism but within Ulster Unionism was the "Remain" viewpoint certainly in a minority. We have this attempt to cover the blushes —

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr Stalford: Yes, I will.

Mr Poots: Is it not the case that the former Prime Minister offered the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party tea and sticky buns and he quickly acquiesced, ignoring what the will of people in the Ulster Unionist Party and, indeed, its voters actually was?

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful, Mr Speaker — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order.

Mr Stalford: The bark from the dog betrays the fact that it has been hit. The roar of the beast gives away its guilt. I am glad and grateful —

Mr Swann: The flush in the face gives away even more.

Mr Stalford: Now, Robin. The Chief Whip needs to calm himself because he was on the same side as me during the referendum. He is responsible for party discipline, but he was at one with the Democratic Unionist Party, which I welcome.

What we have heard and seen from various parties since the referendum amounts to an undemocratic attempt to overturn the verdict that the people have given. It is in all our interests — the people of Northern Ireland and the people of the United Kingdom — that we accept the outcome and now work together to produce the best — I said the best; do not wave your document at me — possible outcomes for the people of Northern Ireland. I know that we will hear a continuous stream of denial and anger about the reality, but the people made their decision —

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude his remarks.

Mr Stalford: — and running off to the courts will not change that. I urge the opposition within the Opposition to get with the programme and let us start working to make the best outcome for Northern Ireland.

Mr O'Dowd: I welcome the opportunity to debate the motion, although we will be voting against the proposal tabled by the Ulster Unionist Party.

In a strange way, it reminds me of the old story or saying about the leader standing on the hill, watching his people go by, and saying, "There go my people. I must follow them". In this case, however, the Ulster Unionist Party is not following the people of Ulster; it is following the people of England and Wales because, as you are aware, 56% of people here voted to remain in the EU. Over 60% of people in Scotland voted to remain in the EU. When the proposer outlined what the other devolved Administrations were doing, he failed to mention that the Scottish Government are proactively engaged in opposition to being dragged out of the European Union against their will. He failed fundamentally —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: In one moment. He failed to mention that important fact. When those from whatever Benches have the rally cry that Brexit means Brexit, will somebody please draw me a diagram of what Brexit means? To date, no one has been able to confirm what Brexit means. Even the current Government in Westminster cannot agree on what Brexit means.

Is there a done deal on Brexit? No, there is not. Is there a unified view about Brexit in what is known as the United Kingdom? No, there is not. Is there everything to play for? Of course there is. We are at the start of a journey here, which is the start of a negotiation not only about the future relationship of what is known as the UK with Europe but about the future of what is known as the UK.

At the other end of whatever Brexit means, it is quite clear that there will be significant constitutional change in these islands. In those circumstances, you can be a follower or a leader. My party makes no apology that we see the way forward for this island as a reunified state. Socially, culturally and economically, we believe that that is the way forward. In the period ahead, however, we believe that

the best place for the North is in the European Union. The best place for the North is in an island of Ireland in the European Union.

The only way to protect the farming industry, communities that rely on Peace money, businesses and the four freedoms that the Ulster Unionist Party states in its document that it wants to protect is to remain part of the European Union.

Mr Poots: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will give way to Lord Morrow first.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. He is at great pains to point out what Scotland did, what Northern Ireland did, what Wales did and what England did in the referendum, but the referendum was not about that. This referendum was about the United Kingdom, of which Northern Ireland is an integral part. If Brexit brings one thing, it will surely bring this: it will remove the heavy hand — the dead hand — of Brussels from the United Kingdom.

12.30 pm

Mr Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr O'Dowd: As I have stated in the Chamber today and previously, there is no unified position in what is known as the United Kingdom in relation to Brussels.

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

Members should be very careful about what they wish for because, if we want to continue our trading relationship with the European Union and other parts of the world, the claims that we will remove the shackles of Brussels do not stack up or add up. Indeed, the Ulster Unionist Party's document acknowledges that.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not give way any more.

The Ulster Unionist Party acknowledges that in its document. It realises that, if we are to continue to trade with Europe and the rest of the world, we will have to sign up to what are known as the four freedoms and to the European trading arrangements. What is Brexit about then? What is Brexit about if we remain under the same legislative competencies as were there previously? What is Brexit about if we simply change the title of our relationship with the European Union? Is it about immigration? Is it about xenophobia? Is it about the rise in hate crimes that has been witnessed since the EU referendum? Is that what it is about? If that is what it is about, let us be honest with each other. People should stand up in the Chamber and say that that is what it is about.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: No.

Agrifood and the agricultural industries need European labour. There are significant employers who will not remain here if they do not have access to European labour. Members who support exiting the European Union and support exiting in the belief that they will control immigration — pulling down the barriers and forcing thousands upon thousands of European citizens to leave these islands — must remember the impact that that would have on the agrifood industry, the agriculture industry and other industries. Also, remember what you would do to your

friends in the property market who rent properties, buy properties and invest in this society. I ask for caution in the hopes and expectations around Brexit, but I will put on the record that this is not a done deal. My party will continue to campaign for the North to remain in the European Union, and we will call on others to support that. We will work with whatever Governments on this island or other islands to ensure that we remain in the European Union.

Ms Hanna: I appreciate the Ulster Unionists bringing this work forward. They deserve credit for at least articulating some of the issues that face Northern Ireland. We will agree to disagree on whether this is plan B or plan A. We are definitely not in the latter group, but we share some of the concerns about the conditions and investments that this place needs to enjoy. What frustrates me and many others about Brexit is the opportunity cost and the lost time.

Many of us came to the debate from the Refugees Welcome demonstration at the front of the Building, which was organised by the Northern Ireland Community of Refugees and Asylum Seekers (NICRAS), Amnesty and all. That was a massive political problem that the European Union really had to get to grips with. Instead of diplomats, policymakers, resources and drafters spending time addressing that huge political problem that affects millions and saves the lives of millions, we are wasting our time trying to solve an unsolvable conundrum that did not have to be thrown into our future.

The Executive parties might dispute this, but it is not in the SDLP's nature to be obstructionist. We believe that, as legislators and as people elected to guard the public interest, it is firmly our duty not just to respect the will of the vast majority of the people here who voted to remain in the European Union, and for the stability, the opportunity and the diversity that that represents, but to do all that we can to prevent this unnecessary change from happening. We are not alone; senior people in every party understand that. Very possibly, Theresa May is seeking excuses not to trigger article 50. Unnecessary as we think that is, we will continue to put forward and take any opportunity that we have to prevent it from happening.

I will address the specific issues in the paper which I think are a useful overview. Many would not think that we were being too cynical to think that the Executive's continued line of, "We are not revealing our negotiating hand", is a cover for, "We did no contingency planning as we were banking on this not happening, and even if we had any ideas we could not agree on them." I notice that the Member who spoke before me did not bother wasting any of his five minutes in actually setting out how we are going to deal with this problem but, instead, threw punches all around the Chamber. Thirty seconds to update us on where our £350 million for the NHS is would not have been too long out of the six minutes that he had.

I will look at some of the issues raised. Trebling our infrastructure, regardless of our future, is vital. People look at the Republic and the advances it secured through corporation tax and fail to learn the lesson. Investors are not hanging around just waiting for the right tax deal; they want skills and infrastructure. I have said before that I am from Galway and that I drive up and down many times in the year. I drive through small towns like Athenry which has a massive number of tech jobs that our young people here deserve. Those jobs did not come just through the low tax rate, they came through investment in skills

and infrastructure and, given the fact that London has effectively stolen our lunch by proposing to reduce its own corporation tax rate, the Executive have not set out how that policy will exist if we are outside the European Union.

The enterprise zone links into some of the issues mentioned. We believe that the European Union, in the main, has done well to balance the interests of businesses and employees. We would like that framework of employment law and protections to remain, and some of that can be discussed.

The issue of education and skills is as above — we deserve those 21st century high-quality jobs here. Many of the businesses that wanted to invest here wanted us as a gateway to Europe. If that gateway is not there then we do not know how attractive that proposal will be.

We wish to see financial guarantees too and we repeatedly stated that there is a lack of guarantees. Even if London shared the detailed interest in our well-being, and I do not believe that it does, there is no guarantee that the UK's economy will remain strong enough to do this.

I will not have time to cover all the issues such as research and development, innovation and the European Horizon 2020 fund. If we are outside Europe, people will need to explain how, and if, we will have access to that fund. To debate common travel and the avoidance of a hard border, we would need longer than an hour and a half, and those who say that neither of the Governments want this to change have yet to set out how they are going to keep what we have in place and how they will square that circle. The whole argument was about protecting our borders and keeping Johnny Foreigner out, but how can you do that when our near neighbour is perfectly entitled to have European consistent immigration policies? Similarly, we could not possibly begin to unpick the legal and regulatory framework, and we have not heard from those who want to get our laws back from the faceless bureaucrats. They have not set out their alternatives so —

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

Ms Hanna: — we welcome the Ulster Unionists having the discussion. It is more than the Executive have done but we agree that it is a bit too early to go to plan B.

Dr Farry: The debate is probably of most use if we see it as a take-note debate regarding the response, or lack of response, from the Executive to Brexit rather than an effort to endorse the view of one political party. There may well be some useful points in the document which do indeed reflect things that were said by my party and others and parts of the business community and civil society. I take issue with the notion of reconciling the words "A Vision for Northern Ireland" and the words "Outside the European Union". To my mind Northern Ireland being outside the European Union is a negative. The issue is how deep and far-reaching the implications and consequences are going to be and how we can actually move to address all of them.

The document is framed at one part of a spectrum of different responses that we can envisage. First, there are the ongoing legal challenges, which are about ensuring a proper constitutional process rather than necessarily trying to stop Brexit itself. Those will work their way through the courts in due course, no doubt.

The second aspect of the responses is how Northern Ireland can influence the UK's negotiating position and seek to mitigate the effects of Brexit, and that is where this document lies in that particular spectrum. To date, the response from the Executive has been poor. We have seen the much more coherent and united response from Scotland. In contrast, we have had a letter from our First Minister and deputy First Minister, which very much reflects the lowest common denominator of agreement, and even in that letter a number of important issues were neglected. I appreciate that it is somewhat embarrassing for the DUP, having campaigned to leave, to now accept many of the points made by the "Remain" side during the referendum.

Even with that, they do not fully grasp the full spectrum of the implications for Northern Ireland.

The final point on the spectrum is whether we can work out some type of special arrangement or special status for Northern Ireland, whether that is preferential access to the European Union or as a region within the European Union. We could see a situation where, in line with the principle of consent, Northern Ireland remains a part of the UK, where we have a strong relationship with our neighbours in the Republic of Ireland but also a strong relationship with Brussels. That may well be something that is much more consistent with the fact that we are in a very particular place and a particular political situation; that we are still very much a contested state; that the people of Northern Ireland voted "Remain"; and, indeed, that we have the right to determine our own future, as reflected in the Good Friday Agreement itself.

It is worth reflecting that, even if we do not manage to have a coherent position from our Executive in due course that it can seek to negotiate some type of special status, a special status, or rather an anomaly, will emerge by default. It is important that we bear that in mind. There cannot be a clean Brexit for the UK as a whole and certainly not for Northern Ireland. First, we share a land border on the island of Ireland that brings some particular complexities, and, secondly, people who are born in Northern Ireland have the right to be Irish citizens and, by default, European Union citizens. That is different from the context elsewhere in the UK, so it brings its own particular situation, as well.

On the effects of Brexit, there are probably four in particular that I want to highlight. First, we have the financial impact from the loss of revenue, and I appreciate that the UK as a whole may have been a net contributor, but Northern Ireland was a net beneficiary. Secondly, even if we take the UK perspective, the UK had much more to gain from its ability to trade and its location for inward investment. Today, we have seen some very difficult economic speculation. Whenever we see the figures for the UK as a whole moving in the wrong direction, Northern Ireland is structurally quite a number of points of a percent behind in many respects, so there is a danger there.

Thirdly, we have the complications around the border, and unless we have the softest of soft Brexits, we will see a situation where there is a different regime for immigration and trading between the Republic of Ireland, as part of the European Union, and the UK. That has to be policed in some manner. So we could see policing done on a line across the island or down the Irish Sea. If it is done down the Irish Sea, then we are looking at one massive

anomaly to handle, and that is before we even come to the implications for the Good Friday Agreement and the balance of relationships that were carefully set out in that document and that very much depend upon the European Union facilitating the freedom of movement, the immigration policy and trading policy. There is a danger that that now becomes unpicked, with massive consequences for our political future.

Mr Lyons: I welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate today. I suppose we will start off with the positive; that is one good thing that comes from the motion before the House.

It is interesting to reflect, though, is it not, on the debate that took place here in the days after 23 June. I remember the debate that took place in the House. I remember the prophets of doom. I remember those who were saying that all sorts of terrible things were going to happen to jobs and the economy, and, indeed, I remember our good friend Mr Aiken — Mr Recession himself; "deep recession" are the words that he used, actually. That, of course, has not come to pass. "Oh, but of course", people say, "that is not going to happen now; we mean that is going to happen later on, when Brexit comes". But the goalposts have been moved a little bit already in regard to this, so I think that the Members sitting on the Benches at the end of the Chamber will understand why my party will not be supporting the motion today. Yes, the Members may not like to hear that, but I doubt that they are surprised, because what we have in front of us here is not a vision at all. It is platitudes; very little on substance —

Mr Nesbitt: It is better than yours. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Lyons: Yes, yes; I have not produced a plan, but I am not the Opposition — *[Interruption.]* I am not the Executive, either.

12.45 pm

The Ulster Unionist Party loves to say that the Executive have done nothing to prepare for Brexit. It does not know what is going on because it did not take up its ministerial positions. It decided not to be part of a Government that are instructing their officials to prepare and meeting other Government Ministers and preparing for the challenges and, indeed, the opportunities that can come from Brexit. That is what this document is very light on; there is nothing in here about the opportunities. Yes, it talks about some of the challenges that we will face and it asks for some answers, but there is nothing about making the most of the opportunities that can come from Brexit. That is why we cannot support it. There is no vision in here whatsoever, so we will not —

Mr Poots: I thank Mr Lyons for giving way. Is it not important to set out a vision in advance of an election and then put that to the people, as this party did? The Ulster Unionist Party put a vision of some kind to the public, but that was rejected, and that is the position that we are in today. The DUP has a vision that has been accepted by the public, and we will work that through.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Lyons: Mr Poots is absolutely correct. The Ulster Unionist Party put a vision for the people of the country ahead of the Assembly election, and that vision was

rejected. It did not put a vision for the EU before the EU referendum because it was so badly divided on it that it did not have one and the party was all pointing in different directions.

We are very clear in regard to our position: we believe that the United Kingdom as a whole is better off outside the European Union. We have seen already how the scaremongering from other parties in this House and, indeed, other parties across the UK, has been found to be completely false. So, we are now trying to make sure that we get the very best deal for the people of Northern Ireland. We will work with the European Union, we will work with Her Majesty's Government, and we will even work with other parties in this Chamber to ensure that we get the best deal that we can. I will give way once more.

Mr Stalford: I am grateful to my friend for giving way. Unfortunately, the Member for South Belfast would not give way to me, but when she refers to people who voted to leave the European Union as being about getting at Johnny Foreigner, do you agree with me that that is precisely the type of sneering, arrogant comment that cost "Remain" the referendum; sneering at ordinary voters and accusing them of being closet racists because they did not vote the way that you wanted them to vote?

Mr Lyons: Mr Stalford makes a very good point because a lot of people like to say that the result of the EU referendum was entirely because of immigration. That was not the case at all. In fact, that shows how out of touch some people are.

Ms Hanna: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyons: I will finish my point first. That shows how out of touch some people are. The people that I spoke to on the doorsteps had concerns about immigration and our borders, but they also had concerns about where our money was being spent in Europe. They also had concerns about our ability to be outward-looking and to trade freely with the rest of the world. So, for Members to say that some kind of xenophobic, inward-looking people enabled this result to happen shows just how out of touch and how wrong they are. On that point, I will give way to Ms Hanna.

Ms Hanna: The Member will note and Hansard will show that I referred to the campaigners and campaigns that focused on immigration issues as well as the mystery £350 million, and I note that still none of you has updated us on that, but will the Member agree that at no point did the "Leave" campaign condemn those racists? At no point did anybody stand up during the campaign and protest against xenophobic signs showing lines of people queuing up at the border of an entirely different country. Will the Member agree that the position that you took in your August letter was a U-turn when you finally acknowledged the need for migrant labour here, and will you outline why that need was not outlined during your campaign?

Mr McAleer: I am thankful for the opportunity to speak on the motion. Our membership of the EU has a wide and significant impact on our lives. I will speak briefly on infrastructure, rural development and agriculture.

In the North, throughout Ireland and the EU transport is crucial for the free movement of goods, services and people.

That is reflected in our PFG framework, and also in one of the most recently published White Papers from the European Union, 'Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area', which sets out a long-term strategy to make the EU transport system more efficient. Central to this is TEN-T, the trans-European network. TEN-T is a multibillion-pound pot used for the funding of intermodal networks throughout the EU. The objective is to decrease the bottlenecks between EU member states to enable the free flow of goods, services and people. One of the objectives is to have the network created by 2030. Obviously, from our perspective, that begs the question: if the exit happens, what will our access be to that pot? What will happen to this part of Europe as the rest of Europe develops a comprehensive TEN-T network of ports, rail and roads? The danger is that, on the periphery of it, we could be more isolated and left behind.

Quite significant funds have come from the EU over the course of the last 10 years for infrastructure — in the region of £100 million. That includes £58 million in TEN-T projects for the likes of the A8 and the development of the transport hub in Belfast. We know that there are projects, such as the York Street interchange, which are eligible for TEN-T funding. Others, like the A2 and, indeed, the A5 and the A6, are part of the TEN-T comprehensive network — not eligible for the entire main pot, but eligible for parts of it as they are part of the comprehensive network.

Last week at the Infrastructure Committee, we heard from Dr Grieve about the greenway strategy and how INTERREG V will be eligible to develop a greenway network throughout the North. Recently, in County Monaghan, €4 million was secured for their greenway, to bring it right to the border at Middletown in County Armagh. In leaving the EU, questions are raised about our access to pots of money such as that for infrastructure projects.

I turn to rural development. It is important to point out that 87% of farmers' income in the North is single farm payment. Single farm payment is just under a quarter of £1 billion per year. A pot was negotiated during the recent CAP reform in the region of £2 billion, right up to 2020. It begs the question: if the exit happens, where does that come from? Where does 87% of the farmers' income come from in the context of exiting from the EU?

On top of that we have the £623 million rural development programme, signed off in August 2015, which opened up exciting opportunities for rural areas. There is a £250 million farm business improvement scheme, £65 million for areas facing natural constraints (ANC), £10 million for rural tourism and £70 million for LEADER, which is funding for rural projects, small businesses in local areas, community projects, crèches — a whole range — and that is in the process of being delivered. I note my recent correspondence from the Minister where no guarantees can be given beyond 2018 for that, even though the budget has been agreed until 2020, which is the term of the CAP. Being a former member of the DARD Committee, I know that this rural development programme was hard fought for at European level, and had to be agreed and negotiated here in terms of topping it up. We must remember that the Tories negotiated a 22% cut in funding during this CAP negotiations. We had to bridge the shortfall here, and that fact alone — that the Tories negotiated a cut during the CAP negotiations in 2014 — proves that they do not really give a

damn about here. It is fanciful that we should create these wish lists, thinking that they will somehow bridge the gap.

In conclusion, the North has one of the highest areas of unemployment and disadvantage in these islands. The danger of exiting is that we will end up being more peripheralised than ever, which will have a huge impact on our communities. We have heard from other Members that there is no such thing as an easy Brexit. The best chance that we have for the future prosperity of the North and this island is for everyone to weigh in behind the "Remain" campaign.

Mr Smith: Most affected, least prepared — that is the best summary of our current position as Northern Ireland faces a unique challenge as a result of Brexit. We are the only region with an EU land border that needs to remain fully open. Agrifood is our largest industry, which will be massively impacted by any reduction in subsidy. It faces even greater danger from potential tariffs if we no longer have single market access under existing terms. Our local economy shows no sign of recovery nine years after recession. Our net income from the EU is over £500 million per year, which will be slashed if future allocations are based purely on the Barnett formula. The enormity of the task ahead should concern everyone in the Chamber. We need to understand fully the implications of Brexit for Northern Ireland and be in a position to articulate our requirements to Westminster and beyond. If we think that London will prioritise our needs of agrifood and manufacturing over those of the city of London, we are in for a rude awakening.

Furthermore, the UK Government are, frankly, making this up as they go along. "Brexit means Brexit" means whatever you want it to mean. The capacity does not exist in London to come up with all the answers. They are looking for ideas and proposals, and that is why we must be clear on our requirements and have a thought-out Brexit plan for Northern Ireland. That is why it is so unbelievable that we have seen no action, no proposals and no plan from, as we have seen today, an Executive totally split on the issue. That is also why the Ulster Unionist Party has engaged with civic society and, in the absence of anything from the Executive, developed the policy document in front of us.

Gavin Robinson, critiquing this document in the media, asked whether this was all that we had produced in two months. The irony, that his party is meant to be in government and whose silence is deafening, appeared to be lost on him. I am no fan of the SNP, but, to be fair to it, it has appointed a Brexit Minister to argue Scotland's case. It has set up a Statutory Committee to monitor progress and introduced an expert advisory body to guide the Scottish Government through the process. Our First Ministers have sent a letter. The comparison does not flatter us. Our Government need to up their game before we are further disadvantaged.

I campaigned and voted for Remain, but I accept the result and the democratic will of the UK electorate. I see no value in trying to fight rearguard actions. We need to identify opportunities from the Brexit process, and that is why our document provides a vision for the future, which is to make Northern Ireland the UK's gateway to the EU. We also need to see evidence that the Executive are getting Northern Ireland Brexit-ready. We propose the setting-up of a Brexit war room, with the skills and capacity to identify the best policy options and priorities for Northern Ireland,

so that we are well prepared and have an effective voice in the upcoming negotiations.

Our 10 key asks in the paper recognise the scale of Brexit's impact on Northern Ireland and therefore show that we need ambition if we are to put in place the transformational policies required to deliver our positive vision. The keywords are "ambition", "transformation" and "vision". That is what Northern Ireland both needs and deserves. We want a massive increase in infrastructure investment to create an economic stimulus to break out of our bottom-of-the-league growth and to provide the connectivity required for success in the 21st century. To transform our economy, we must turn all of Northern Ireland into an enterprise zone and create an emphasis on skill development to build the most skilled workforce in western Europe in our chosen industries. In recognition of our unique status, the Executive must secure guarantees that no group in Northern Ireland will be worse off financially for five years post-Brexit. To deliver our vision for Northern Ireland post-Brexit, we must have continued access to the European single market and a continuation of the common travel area with the Republic, with no hard border to GB ports and airports disadvantaging Northern Ireland.

Those are our requirements to ensure that Northern Ireland is Brexit-ready. The Ulster Unionist Party has risen to the challenge to fill the gap in leadership and direction from the Executive. No doubt some will criticise, but their voices have little credibility in the absence of their own proposals.

Northern Ireland needs a plan. We have provided one. Unless the Chamber wishes to continue as the region most affected and least prepared, I urge you to support the motion.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Murphy: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion, although I do not particularly think that the party opposite is sincere in bringing it. It cannot possibly imagine that anyone would sign up to the vision that it has put to us today. I do not think that it fully expects anyone to. To be quite honest, from looking at the demeanour of its Members over there, I think that they are here for the craic.

Anyway, the party has asked us to sign up to a vision that falls at the first hurdle, because it asks us to sign up to a vision of the North outside the EU, which is in defiance of the mandate that the people of the North gave us during the referendum, which is to defend the position of the North inside the EU, and that is clearly what we intend to do.

When my colleague Mr O'Dowd put it to the Ulster Unionist Party that the stock answer of "Brexit means Brexit" has become a cliché, its leader waved his document as though it were the modern version of the Dead Sea scrolls and all the answers to what Brexit means are contained in it. I find that somewhat laughable, having read through the document itself.

There are no solutions in it. It is predicated on the wrong basis. It is predicated on the generosity of the British Government, who remain committed to huge cuts to public expenditure and have, over the last number of years since the Conservatives came back to power with the support of the Ulster Unionist Party at the time, decimated the budgets available to the Executive. They have reduced our public spend and put severe pressure on spending on things like

health, education and infrastructure. Yet somehow the document that the Ulster Unionist Party has produced, probably over a cup of coffee on a Friday afternoon, has with a magic wand waved away its role in putting such a Government into position in the first instance and assumes that the Government will do a complete U-turn on their continued desired objective of reducing the budget deficit through huge cuts to public spending.

1.00 pm

It is also predicated on — other Members have pointed this out — an uncostered spending spree on the part of the Executive. A threefold increase in spending on infrastructure would be absolutely wonderful. I am sure everybody around the House would welcome a threefold expenditure on infrastructure going forward and a huge amount of expenditure on other areas. Yet the same UUP, as long ago as July, issued a statement criticising the Executive for what it considered unsustainable borrowing and spending plans. Now, they wish to raise by a level of three the expenditure on infrastructure. In particular, they criticised the Finance Minister and asked him to recognise that every pound borrowed today would mean that even more had to be repaid by future generations. They have brought a proposition to the House today and asked everybody to sign up to a vision that includes a huge amount of public expenditure that has been not costed or budgeted for, when only in July there was public criticism from the party on that.

The UUP has also rehashed the enterprise zone proposition. Again, that comes from the 2010 document produced by, as people may remember UCUNF — that now sounds more like an accusation than a political consideration that was put at that time. Certainly, if any plaudits were to be given for the document the Ulster Unionist Party has produced today, they would be for recycling. It should certainly merit consideration for that.

Clearly, the proposition is predicated on the generosity of the British Government, but that no longer exists and has not existed since the UUP assisted in putting them into power. It is predicated on the basis of ignoring the mandate that was given to us by the people of the North to remain in the EU. It is also predicated on a completely uncostered set of spending propositions that, they know from their relationship with their former electoral partners in the Conservative Party, the Executive have absolutely no possibility of getting access to. I listened to the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party being interviewed, and he said, "Well, if there is all this more money to come, surely we could spend it on this". If that is the basis of this proposition, we are all in trouble.

I do not think that will be any surprise to the Ulster Unionist Party, and I do not think it expected anything less than that. In fairness, a debate on the implications of Brexit is welcome, albeit on the basis of a document that no one could sign up to. I am sure that, if truth be told, half the Members sitting on the Benches over there could not sign up to it either.

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

Ms S Bradley: First, I echo the comments made by my colleague Claire Hanna that it is nice that we have an opportunity to look at and speak to a document in the

House. When I compare the document with that of the Government, I find that, of course, there is no comparison to be drawn, because there is none. We have nothing more than a letter.

It amuses me slightly to watch a debate on Brexit in the House become nothing more than a heckling and shouting match, while very good manners are demonstrated when others in government speak. It really is disgraceful that Members have come to the House today without even having an open mind to discuss how Northern Ireland will look and what the consequences will be. Why has the debate not raised issues on single farm payments? Businesses are looking for leadership. Businesses are making decisions based on the uncertainties we face. This debate has offered nothing from the government parties to say to those people that we are even sitting down to consider what is happening. In fact, nowhere in the House can we look for an wider alleged position between the two government parties: one for "Remain" and one for exit. I say "alleged" position because I see neither party doing a whole lot about the position that it holds.

I look at them and think that the one agreed position that appears to have been adopted by this Government is "If we do nothing, the Opposition cannot scrutinise that. If we do nothing, nobody can say that we are doing it the wrong way. Nobody can say that our priorities are different from what they should be". Quite frankly, that is where we and this debate are. Nothing has been shared in the Chamber by the government parties today that is worth carrying out of the Chamber to those who have genuine concerns, those who are making decisions in the boardrooms of small businesses about whether their business will survive, those who depend on agricultural policies to keep their farm business open or those who are asking whether their sons or daughters will be able to carry on in their farm enterprise. There are no answers, there is no thinking, and no pathway has been pointed out here today that allows me to offer any assurance to any of those people.

The level of debate that has been offered here is nothing short of disgraceful. I have listened to debates in which people are very comfortable with breaking things down geographically and boastfully telling us that their constituency voted to leave, yet the mantra that this was a UK decision quickly follows. I also listened to Lord Morrow telling me eloquently about how the majority are unionists who voted to remain. He can cite that, and be dismissive of the fact that the majority of people in Northern Ireland voted to remain.

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Bradley: Yes, I will give way.

Lord Morrow: I think that the Member is slightly confused: I said no such thing. What I said, in addressing an issue that the Ulster Unionists were putting forward, was that the majority of unionists who were voting — 85% — voted to leave the EU. I have a high regard for the Member, but she is now treading very close to what we have come to expect from those who voted "Remain". They want to talk down to everybody. The little people have spoken and said that they want the dead hand of Brussels to be removed. You, I, the Ulster Unionists and Sinn Féin should respect that.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member has a minute added to her time.

Ms S Bradley: May I remind the Member that we are Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly? I am elected to represent the people of Northern Ireland, a truth that may sit uncomfortably with the Member when he makes his reference. I do not dismiss the majority voice of Northern Ireland. If you feel comfortable and take security from breaking it down into green and orange, do that —

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Ms S Bradley: I will in a moment — but do not do it in the hope that people will not notice that this Government are doing nothing.

Dr Farry: Does the Member agree that there were ordinary people on both sides of the argument in the UK as a whole and in Northern Ireland? When Lord Morrow refers to 85% of unionists having voted “Leave”, he has no basis for making that claim. That is an entirely fabricated statistic, just like all the other ones from the “Leave” campaign.

Ms S Bradley: I agree with that. We will put that into the catalogue of statistics that we can never really put our finger on.

What has come out of the debate today? If you stand on your feet to make any argument for or against Brexit and do not find yourself uttering the words “single farm payment” or words that are relevant to our business community, I ask you to please be seated and to go away and find a think tank.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member should bring her remarks to a close.

Ms S Bradley: Perhaps the appointment of external bodies or people, which, apparently, we are not allowed to discuss because there is democracy with a small “d” on certain days, is not a get-out.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member’s time is up.

Mr Agnew: The Green Party campaigned for the UK to remain part of the EU, and it is unsurprising that that continues to be our position. Having seen a majority vote in Northern Ireland to remain, we continue to uphold that position and to seek to represent those who wish to remain. Northern Ireland did not vote to leave; Northern Ireland does not want to leave; and Northern Ireland would be significantly disadvantaged if we did eventually exit the European Union.

I listened to the debate and heard the statistic about 85% of unionism. I query that and I query continually breaking down this society into unionism versus nationalism — “green and orange”, as it is often put, although there are shades of green. I look at my constituency. For those who like to view the world in such terms, it is a unionist constituency, with four unionist and no nationalist MLAs, yet a majority voted to remain. So, the statistic does not stack up under any proper scrutiny.

The motion asks us to envisage a Northern Ireland outside the EU. Let us address that. If we are to leave, how best can we mitigate the damage, as I see it, that it would do to Northern Ireland? It is important that we work together, and I know that the proposer of the motion has been constructive in cross-party discussions on how we can act together and get an agreed platform on how we should best act in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland. That is why, to some extent, it may be a question of

phrasing that makes the motion a bit disappointing. It calls on us to endorse an Ulster Unionist position, not an agreed cross-party position. If it is a proposal for discussion, yes, absolutely — many Members said that it was welcome in that regard — but I think that seeking endorsement at this stage is taking us a bit far.

I will address some of the aspects that I have difficulty with. I think that we will get cross-party consensus on securing maximum funding for Northern Ireland from existing EU funds and that type of issue. Then, however, there are some genuine policy decisions that we would have to make post-Brexit, if it were to happen. How do we want to address the issue of environmental protection? I am heartened by the document’s call for the continued protection of our natural environment and biodiversity. That is excellent and something that we can agree to and sign up to, but the same document calls for Northern Ireland to be an enterprise zone, with the deregulation of planning. In general, planning functions are there to protect our environment. Do we want to protect, or do we want to deregulate? The two rarely go hand in hand. In fact, the document calls explicitly for the protection of biodiversity but also for the scrapping of fishing quotas, which are designed precisely to protect our biodiversity.

In Northern Ireland, we have had the debate about corporation tax. The Green Party and I have long stood as opponents of the proposed reduction. There are further proposals to reduce taxation in this document, but, at the same time, we call for more for Northern Ireland. We go to the Government and say that we want to give back less but take more. Whilst it is not a bad place to start — it is not a bad ask, and I do not think that anyone here would disagree with our paying less in and getting more back — I suspect that we have to anticipate the possibility that the British Government will not be predisposed to that argument.

We do and can work together to make a coherent argument for why Northern Ireland should be made a special case. It was done for corporation tax and for air passenger duty, and I think that we can do it for the EU referendum —

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

Mr Agnew: — but we must work together and agree our asks first.

1.15 pm

Mr Carroll: I agree with some things in this document such as securing financial guarantees for those who are in receipt of EU funding, securing the common travel area, making sure that there is no hard border and making sure that there is increased investment in infrastructure. The document also briefly refers to the freedom of movement of labour, something that my party is resolutely in support of, particularly given the huge economic and cultural benefits that migrants bring to our society.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not. Indeed, our NHS would have struggled to survive if it were not for the vital work carried out by migrants in our health service. If we can have movement of capital around the world with the click of a

button, the movement of human beings across the world should be a guaranteed right.

I suspect though that we would go further than the proposers of the motion. We are for the freedom of movement of all people, be they EU, or non-EU, citizens. Today's demonstration at Stormont about the refugee crisis should serve as a horrible reminder of the reactionary role that the EU has played in creating "fortress Europe", which keeps refugees caged behind fences; which says nothing, of course, about the comments made by a Member of the House, a representative of the Ulster Unionist Party that proposed the motion no less, who thought it funny to equate refugees with dogs. Shame on the Member for such disgraceful remarks.

Mrs Palmer: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not.

That said, there is some common ground between what I might call the establishment Opposition in the Chamber and the anti-establishment socialist opposition that I am a member of on this side of the Chamber. However, I think that the difficulty and problem with this —

Mrs Palmer: Will the Member give way?

Mr Carroll: I will not. The problem with this establishment-style of opposition is that it does not really offer a radically different alternative to the one presented by the Executive. For example, this document calls for the creation of an enterprise zone, which, in reality, is just a slightly more right-wing version of the economic strategy outlined by the Executive. Take corporation tax; the anti-establishment opposition on this side of the Chamber has long warned that talk of reducing corporation tax would be a race to the bottom, costing working-class people and public services hundreds of millions of pounds and with only the wealthiest gaining from it. We have the evidence in front of us. Mr Nesbitt, in his party's document, suggests that we should go further and calls not for a 12.5% rate of corporation tax but for it to be lowered even further to 10% and then — who knows — maybe 8%, 6% or 5% in the future. The Executive might well have initiated this race to the bottom, but the establishment Opposition, and the Ulster Unionist Party in particular, now seem determined to take pole position in that race to the bottom. It is a failure —

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I know that the Member is newly elected but, a moment ago, he made a very serious accusation and attack on a party colleague, who asked to make an intervention to defend and explain herself. The Member did not allow it. I think that that is very poor form.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): If the Member wishes to register a complaint on that matter to the Speaker's Office in her own right, she is entitled to do so.

Mr Carroll: In my opinion, it is a failure that the motion merely calls for an accelerated and more extreme version of the Executive's own economic programme. There is no evidence that reducing corporation tax will be beneficial to the mass of people who live here. It will likely wipe hundreds of millions of pounds from the public sector and almost certainly lead to job losses rather than job creation.

The most important point to be made is that we live in a post-Brexit world but the contours of that have not been determined for the future. There are positives in the

motion, but, all in all, it falls short of the radical alternative that we need. The kind of alternative that the anti-establishment opposition stands for —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Carroll: — is one where we unite ordinary people across the North and the South and, rather than roll the red carpet out for corporations like Apple, Google and Starbucks, we make them pay.

Mrs Palmer: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I ask the Member to withdraw his comments and apologise to me before I take up the opportunity to report it formally.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): That may well not be a point of order, but I suggest that, in regard to this matter, if the Member subsequently, during the debate, wishes to intervene and if he interprets your remarks to be correct, he may do so. However, if you have a complaint, as I outlined earlier, you may make it directly to the Speaker's Office.

Mr Poots: We are used to shrill voices, excitement and animation when it comes to discussions around Brexit. Today has been slightly less shrill, although some Members have been working themselves up quite well. We were told before all of this, in an attempt to browbeat and scare the public in the United Kingdom, that houses prices would collapse: they have not. We were told that interest rates would go up: they have gone down. We were told that food prices would go up: they have not. We were told that farmgate prices would go down: they have gone up. We were told that share prices would go down: they have gone up. And we were told that an emergency Budget would be initiated, and it has not been.

Mrs Long: I thank the Member for giving way. Will he concede that we have not actually left the European Union yet? People seem to have missed that in this debate.

Mr Poots: The problem is that people told us that it would happen immediately; we were not going to have to wait until we left the European Union. We now see the delayed apocalypse predicted by the Alliance Party, the SDLP and others in the House. Thankfully, that has not been the case.

I heard someone speak today about farmers as if he was representative of farmers. The farmers voted heavily to get out of Europe. Nationalist farmers voted quite heavily to get out of Europe. That is the feedback that I got. They were told that they were mad, and people said, "You are going to lose out so much". The single farm payment has been guaranteed by the United Kingdom Government for this period of time, and anybody who has an ounce of sense will know that, beyond that time, the single farm payment was going to come down. The accession countries were promised in the previous negotiation that they would get more. The only way that they would get more would be if it were taken off the countries that get it now or, alternatively, if Europe were to take more money off the taxpayer to give to farmers in eastern Europe. Greater subsidies were going east, and farmers had the common sense to see that.

Farmers voted to get away from over 2,700 different regulations that applied to them as they carried out their daily activities. Farmers were sick to the teeth of being regulated by Europe. Many other businesses are sick to the teeth of being regulated by Europe. The red tape that is

being applied to them is unnecessary and holds business back. Businesses will be better off outside Europe because they will have the opportunity to get on with the job in hand.

Mr O'Dowd: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Mr O'Dowd did not give way to me when it was requested, so I will not reciprocate kindly to him on this occasion.

People wanted rid of the shackles of Europe. People wanted democracy restored. The public wanted democracy. In my opinion, the first line of democratic government is local government, then it is regional government and then national government. Europe is the most undemocratic element of our governance, yet on environmental issues, for example, over 80% of the decisions taken in the House are cascaded down from Europe. The public rightly voted to get out of Europe.

I am not sure where the vision is in the document. Mr Aiken did not do a great job of demonstrating much of a vision. Perhaps the person who makes the winding-up speech will show us where that clear strategic vision is.

Let us be clear: we are in a negotiation period and that negotiation will be led by our national Government. I am proud to be part of the United Kingdom and to put my faith in our national Government to negotiate on behalf of the United Kingdom as a whole. Our Executive will be consistently and constantly in contact with our national Government during those negotiations outlining the issues that are of strategic importance to Northern Ireland. It will not be done by being blasted across the media; it will be done in a very positive manner in the way that government should do it. It will be done privately and will deliver the deal for the people in the United Kingdom.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. His point was that the Northern Ireland Executive would be involved. Is it not the case that the Northern Ireland Executive are already involved, that they are having discussions with other Ministers and have told their officials to get on with the work of preparing? If the opposition parties were so good, they would have questioned our Ministers, found out that detail and would have it. That work is going on, and that torpedoes the argument that other parties have made in here, which they have got away with, that nothing is being done.

Mr Poots: You see, a little knowledge is dangerous, and, thankfully, the Member has dispensed some good knowledge to us. The Ulster Unionist Party has little knowledge because it decided to go outside the camp. It does not know what is going on and then tries to create speculation —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Poots: — that things are not happening, when, in fact, things are happening. We will be involved in those negotiations and will deal with Theresa May, David Davis, Boris Johnson and the key people who will be making —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Time is up. I call Jim Allister. Mr Allister, you have four minutes.

Mr Allister: In the day that is in it, Mr Deputy Speaker, I regret that you have not used your prerogative to extend my four minutes, but there you are.

I have to say that, in many places, the content of the document is quite haphazard and random, but the colour scheme is excellent. However, we need to recognise that the Ulster Unionist Party has produced more than any of the rest of us. It has produced a document, which is more than any other party in the House, my own included, has produced and more — where the expectation would be greater — than the Executive have produced. Hence, of course, the rather churlish and embarrassed response from the Executive Benches in the debate. Although the document can be properly critiqued and criticised on many fronts, it is, as I said, more than anyone else has produced, least of all the Executive. Of course, that highlights the fact that we have an Executive who are pulling in opposite directions on this seminal issue. We have Sinn Féin wanting to stay in Europe and the DUP wanting to leave Europe. It is no surprise, then, that there is no cogency or coherence to anything being said on behalf of the Executive as a whole and no surprise that there is no document from them.

I am saddened that, in the debate, many of the “Remoaners” are still fighting the battle that they have lost. On the Sinn Féin, SDLP and Alliance Benches, we have had some of the Japanese soldiers who are still fighting the war in the Philippine jungle. The referendum is over. You lost. We are leaving the EU. Get over it and get into a state of mind where we will grasp the opportunities that have opened up.

1.30 pm

I welcome the fact that the Ulster Unionist Party, in this document, has accepted that we are leaving the EU. When we leave, all of the United Kingdom must leave on equal terms. There can be no such thing as special status that keeps Northern Ireland half in and half out. We went in as one nation; we leave as one nation. There must be no compromise on that fundamental issue.

As I indicated, some of the content of the document does not impress me. I am not impressed, for example, by the suggestion that the issuing of visas should be devolved to Northern Ireland. That should never be devolved in a united kingdom: different visa arrangements are totally incompatible with a united kingdom. There is an incongruous proposal for a peace centre. It seems to come out of the blue, for whatever reason. There is a suggestion, too, of a war room. Well, there might be some from the ranks who might be in the war room who might have a little more paramilitary or military experience than others.

What we need is a cogency of approach —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Will the Member bring his remarks to a close, please?

Mr Allister: — that embraces the opportunities that lie ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): Time is up.

Mr Allister: It is not about making the best of a bad job; it is about embracing the opportunities which are manifold in leaving the EU.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank all the Members who have been here, particularly those who contributed to the debate. The first formal Opposition day is next Monday. I am pleased that the final warm-up match, as it were, was on an issue as important as the future of Northern Ireland and the United

Kingdom outside the European Union. I am particularly pleased to see so many members of the Democratic Unionist Party with us. I am just glad that the debate did not clash with the Conservative Party conference, because I know that they are very keen on a little champagne reception at lunchtime. No austerity for members of the DUP there. Of course, they are in bed and in Government with Sinn Féin.

All Mr Murphy can do is make a tired, jaded reference to the 2010 general election. I would say to him, were he here, that I am very confident that historians can look at our association for one general election with the Conservative Party and tell us what damage that did to the vulnerable, compared with his party's lifetime support for the Provisional IRA campaign and what that did to the vulnerable in this country.

Mr Murphy was among those who were quite disparaging of the document, which, I think he said, was knocked off:

“over a cup of coffee on a Friday afternoon”.

We then heard Mr Allister say that he thought that it was a bit confusing. Others have also been less than complimentary. That is fine, but this is not just our work. The Ulster Unionist Party brought together a Brexit advisory panel and populated it with industrialists, businesspeople, trade unions, universities, farmers, people from agrifood processing, economists and others. Lord Morrow, from a sedentary position, asked me to name them. My point to him is this: you do not know who they are, but they know who you are — those of you who criticise their work as shoddy.

This Opposition will do two things: we will scrutinise and, where appropriate, we will offer an alternative. Scrutiny does not necessarily mean criticising; it means taking a close look, although when criticism is due, we will criticise. We are highly critical of what the Executive failed to do in the run-up to 23 June and in its aftermath. There was no contingency planning for potentially the biggest development in the United Kingdom since the Second World War. There were only two outcomes, and the Executive planned for only one — business as usual. In response to a question for written answer about contingency plans tabled by me, the First Ministers wrote back to say that they had instructed Sir Malcolm McKibbin as head of the Civil Service to start doing things. There could be no clearer proof that nothing was done in advance.

We then had the letter of 10 August. Fair enough: they wrote to the Prime Minister, defining five areas of concern. They were quite right to do so, but I have to say that those five areas of concern were as obvious on 10 June as they were on 10 August. Then, for a two-party coalition — just two parties — not to be able to put on a united front when the Secretary of State responsible for the United Kingdom exiting the European Union came to visit is a sin. A house divided has no leverage in political negotiations. I know that Mr Poots is proud that his United Kingdom Government are going to negotiate on our behalf. He said that he has every confidence in the United Kingdom Government to negotiate on our behalf and to protect the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Stalford: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: I will not be giving way. I will use my 10 minutes.

I have four words for Mr Poots: the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr Poots: That is three words.

Mr Nesbitt: That is four words, Mr Poots, not three. Clearly, you were never Finance Minister, and thank the Lord for it.

We will scrutinise and offer an alternative. This, of course, is not an alternative, because there is nothing to give an alternative to, but it is the next best thing. It is built on an approach that has three legs. The first is a vision. Again, for Mr Poots's benefit, our vision is of Northern Ireland as the United Kingdom's gateway to the European Union, because we have that land border. Then, there is a plan, which is built around the fact that we need to get together the intellectual capacity and the resource to handle six sets of negotiations: those about not just our withdrawal from the EU but our new set of arrangements with it; negotiations with the World Trade Organization; negotiations with third countries; negotiations with London; and negotiations among ourselves. What are our policy priorities? What are the options? What do we want to achieve?

As Mrs Hanna said, the UK's priorities will not necessarily be Northern Ireland's. Take our universities, for example. I have heard senior members of our universities articulate the fear that, while there will be additional money for research after Brexit has been completed, it is more likely to go to the triangle of the universities in London, Oxford and Cambridge than it is to come to the two universities in Northern Ireland. The fact that Queen's is a so-called Russell Group university does not guarantee it any special status over Ulster University, as it is now called, when it comes to resource.

Mr Aiken opened the debate very well by giving a comparison between what we have failed to do and the achievements so far of Scotland, Wales, the City of London and our Secretary of State. He spoke about the importance of universities and infrastructure rather than just the agrifood sector, on which we tend to concentrate first. The voluntary and community sector will potentially lose out big time on funding.

We then had a sparkling contribution from Mr Stalford. He said that our document is uncoded and untested. What about number 6 of our 10 asks, which is the common travel area? What is untested about the common travel area? It has been around for longer than the Member for South Belfast has been alive. He said that our proposals are uncoded. Of course they are. They are not proposals to take money from one Department and give to another in the current block grant and Budget but the asks that we should get from the UK Government to take out of what we were told was going to be the tsunami of repatriated sterling that would no longer go to Brussels if we voted for Brexit. Of course the asks are a wish list that is not fully coded. Mr Stalford is still counting the votes. He is still fighting the referendum, even though 52% of the United Kingdom said that we should come out. He was followed by his partner in government, John O'Dowd for Sinn Féin, who said that the important vote was the 56% in Northern Ireland who voted to remain. A house divided has no leverage in negotiations.

It is time to move beyond Brexiteers and "Remainers". The people of the United Kingdom have voted: they have voted that we come out. We have to seize the opportunities inherent in that situation.

Mr Lyons opened by looking to the past. He accused us of walking away in some sense from the devolved institutions, yet we all voted to create an official Opposition. If we are going to talk about disrespecting the institutions, what about the use of the royal prerogative? What is democratic about Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness — particularly Mr McGuinness, a proud republican — conferring on themselves the privileges and authority of a monarch? Queen Marlene I decided, "We will have a new Executive press secretary". What is democratic about that?

There were wonderful interventions from Mr Poots and Mr Stalford, very sneering critiques of those who sneer. As Mr Smith, my colleague in Strangford, put it, we are in the most affected area yet are the least prepared.

There has been a lot of talk about the content of the document, not about the motion. The motion is not about accepting the content of the document; the document makes it clear that these are initial thoughts. What the motion calls for is that the House "adopts the approach" in the document, which is a vision, a plan and some key asks that will be tests of whether we have achieved what we wanted to achieve. You vote for this document, or you vote for this one. Nobody has given an alternative approach. I commend it to the House.

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 15; Noes 70.

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken and Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer and Mr Robinson.

The following Member voted in both Lobbies and is therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): As Question Time begins at 2.00 pm I suggest that the House takes its ease until then. The next debate will commence after Question Time.

2.00 pm

(Mr Speaker [Mr Newton] in the Chair)

Oral Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Speaker: Before I call the first Member to ask a question, I remind Members to keep rising in their place if they wish to ask a supplementary question.

T:BUC: Summer Camps

1. **Ms Bunting** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the Together: Building a United Community summer camps. (AQO 236/16-21)

11. **Mr Milne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the summer camps delivered under Together: Building a United Community. (AQO 246/16-21)

Mr McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Mr Speaker, with your permission I will ask junior Minister Fearon to answer the question.

Ms Fearon (Junior Minister, The Executive Office): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 1 and 11 together.

A headline action under Together: Building a United Community was to develop a pilot programme consisting of 100 summer camps. This target was achieved with 101 summer camps delivered in 2015-16. The summer camp programme for 2016-17 opened for applications on 15 March 2016, and letters of offer were accepted by 103 groups.

Summer camps are about building positive relationships among young people aged from 11 to 19 on a cross-community basis. They represent an investment of £1.2 million by the Executive, and approximately 4,000 young people have participated in and benefited from programmes this year. Along with junior Minister Ross, I have had the opportunity to visit a number of camps. The young people involved demonstrated an appetite to take an active role in shaping our society. The summer camp programme allows young people to understand each other's perspectives and make new friendships. The programme is helping to create a shared society based on good relations and reconciliation. A reunion event will also be held in early 2017 that will bring all camp participants together and provide an opportunity to further develop friendships and celebrate achievements. I am delighted to be involved with this programme, which has provided an opportunity for our young people to get to know each other through new enjoyable and shared experiences.

Ms Bunting: I thank the Minister for her answer. I note that she mentioned a reunion event, but what mechanisms are in place beyond that to ensure that the established relationships are built on and maintained?

Ms Fearon: I thank the Member for her question. As I said, junior Minister Ross and I visited many of the camps, and it has been a hugely rewarding experience to engage with those young people and hear their views and get feedback about the friendships that they have made —

friendships that have taken on a life of their own thanks to social media. The young people said that, perhaps, the residential part was the most rewarding for them, as they got to spend so much time together in a few days. Participation in the camps is evidence that young people and parents want to work together and want to build a better society based on friendship.

Last year's pilot showed us that 95% of young people made new friendships, and 85% of them wanted to stay in touch. We need to do everything that we can to facilitate that. The Member mentioned the reunion event that we are holding next year, but, beyond that, it will be important for us to get some parental feedback to see if we can get a broader picture and try to make next year's programmes even better.

Mr Swann: How many of the 103 camps that took place were going to take place anyway, and how many were new initiatives brought about by T:BUC?

Ms Fearon: All of the summer camps were new. Summer camps were held in every one of the 18 Assembly constituencies, and positive feedback has been received on all of them. The summer camps were delivered in association with the Education Authority, and the districts were based on the old education and library board regions, so the summer camps were spread across the regions.

Mr Dickson: I thank the junior Minister for the response she has given. I welcome what the summer camps do, particularly in creating and fostering friendships, but can she tell the House how those friendships can develop into genuine reconciliation between communities in Northern Ireland? Is that aspect of the Together: Building a United Community summer camps being audited by the Department?

Ms Fearon: The summer camps were based very much on a co-design approach, and young people were involved in the development of each stage to design it in accordance with what they felt would benefit them most. They were involved from the very beginning. It is important that we focus beyond the summer camps and put initiatives in place for our young people to maintain those friendships.

As I said before, a lot of the friendships have taken shape naturally, but, beyond that, I think that it is important that we put mechanisms in place.

Mr Milne: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. What rural-proofing measures were taken to ensure access to the summer camp programme in all areas not just in urban ones?

Ms Fearon: I thank the Member for his question. It has always been the intention that the summer camps would be regionally spread, and I know from my experience how important it is to give opportunities to rural communities. I have said many times before that it is not the case that rural communities do not experience community relations issues; it is just that they manifest themselves differently.

I visited a camp during the week in my area of South Armagh in Kingsmills, Silverbridge and Lislea. Some of those young people live 15 miles apart, and their experiences are very different from those of someone in Belfast or Derry. I am sure that the Member will be happy to know that there are three very successful camps in his area. The summer camp applications were assessed by regional panels with local representatives, and the highest-quality

applications were accepted for funding across each of the education and library boards in the district. The need for rural proofing was very much built in to designing this year's programme, and there is a rural impact statement available now on the Executive website with the detail of that.

Social Investment Fund: Update

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund (SIF). (AQO 237/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: All £80 million allocated by the Executive to the social investment fund has now been committed to projects to improve the quality of life for people living in targeted areas of deprivation. The remaining letters of offer issued last week, including commitments for the Lanyon tunnels, the St Comgall's project and the Thomas Davis project in the southern zone. Not only are all projects now committed, but delivery is progressing apace. Some 38 projects worth over £48 million have commenced delivery, and 15 projects worth £26 million are operational. That includes four capital projects that have completed construction and which are delivering vital services in local communities.

Success equates to over 800 people benefiting from paid work placements and training to support employment worth £18.5 million, and over 80 have already secured jobs; over 1,300 children and families benefiting from early intervention projects, with £5.7 million allocated to support physical, intellectual, social and emotional development; almost 1,000 children and families benefiting from dedicated educational support projects worth £5.5 million. The social investment fund will continue to grow in success as more projects commence and become operational this year.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Minister for his response. Will the Minister highlight some of the successes of the programme?

Mr McGuinness: The greatest success of the social investment programme was the fact that we went out not with a top-down approach but that we went out to communities to ask them what their needs were and how we could prioritise their preferred projects.

The social investment fund has allocated £60 million to community projects. That is proof that the Executive are responsive to community needs and committed to promoting equality and opportunity for all. Our focus beyond spend, however, should be on the difference that the fund is making and will continue to make in our communities. The fund seeks to build confident and resilient communities; it seeks to invest in community assets and creates pathways in training and employment. Indeed, the delivery model developed by SIF is itself a model for future working that engages local people to identify priorities and to work collaboratively with partners to deliver tangible outcomes.

This model of delivery acts as a template for the effective delivery of Executive policy. The legacy of the social investment fund is that it is an investment in the future, an investment in communities, and in the skills and life opportunities of our people. I have been at quite a few events where people have effectively graduated through it, and I can tell you from first-hand experience of talking to people who have benefited from it that they are deeply appreciative in every section of our community that the SIF

programme has dramatically improved the quality of their lives.

Mr McNulty: Thank you for your answer, deputy First Minister. I hope that you enjoyed the match yesterday. We are going to get another day out. Will the deputy First Minister provide an update on how dormant bank accounts in the North, which amount to some £7 million, will be used for social investment strategies?

Mr McGuinness: That is an issue over and beyond that of the money we have allocated to the social investment fund. It is something that we continue to investigate. There have been decisions in the past to utilise whatever funds can be made available for the benefit of local communities. It is something that we will keep continuously under review.

On the match yesterday, it was a wonderful occasion — 80,000 people enjoying themselves. If you want to know what Irish life is like, go to Croke Park on All-Ireland Sunday, whether it be hurling or Gaelic football. It was a match littered with mistakes, but all the more exciting for that, and as the Member has said, we are all looking forward to another day out.

Mrs Overend: I thank the deputy First Minister for some of that information. Some groups in my constituency of Mid Ulster have had to resubmit their applications due to costings, and for other reasons. Can the deputy First Minister inform the House how many groups have had to resubmit applications or costings and how that will affect the delivery and timing of the projects?

Mr McGuinness: All of us know that, as capital projects progress, costs are, in many cases, increasing. This is natural, given the time span. This is primarily due to the passage of time, rising construction costs and unforeseen construction issues that typically arise throughout the lifetime of the projects. Officials are working closely with the Central Procurement Directorate, lead partners and project promoters to manage the costs of existing projects as far as possible — and of those going through approvals, to minimise the potential cost increases of future projects.

Similar cost-saving approaches are being applied at design and construction stage, where possible, to minimise the extent of increases in individual projects. However, we are aware that there is still a likelihood that costs will continue to increase for capital projects and, as such, we have secured revised business case approval to take account of the increased period of the fund, the type of project being delivered and the increased budget anticipated to deliver in full the projects prioritised by local steering groups. We intend to seek Executive agreement to amend and increase the social investment fund budget to allow all current prioritised projects to be delivered.

On the issue of how many groups have been affected, I do not have that figure off the top of my head, but we will write to you with an answer.

Mr Poots: The match yesterday was a truly wonderful occasion. Seeing United beaten 3-1 by Watford was absolutely brilliant.

In terms of the work being done, have you had the opportunity to look at Early Intervention Lisburn and how it is being supported by the investment fund? Can you look at how this might be rolled out in other parts of Northern Ireland? Because what you are seeing is transformational difference being made to the lives of

youngsters who are almost destined to fail, and who will now have better educational opportunities and outcomes, better employment prospects and better health outcomes. This is an area that badly needs tackled in working-class communities right across Northern Ireland.

Mr McGuinness: The reference to Manchester United was a low blow, but I would expect nothing else. I said before José Mourinho was appointed that it was a dodgy appointment, and I still think it was.

More importantly, the Member is absolutely right in relation to the huge benefits that the social investment fund can bring for families and for local communities. Our fund is investing £18.5 million in employment-focused projects and, through this, supporting over 800 people in training and paid work placements. They are integrating local people with local employers. Over 80 people have already secured full-time jobs and credit their success directly to their engagement on these funded projects, particularly as most jobs are with the participants' host employers.

One of those now employed was previously unemployed for 26 years. She described, in her own words, how the programme has impacted upon her life:

"I would never have had the confidence to look for work, go for interviews or do up a CV without the support from the programme. I received excellent support and advice on a weekly basis and it has given me a new outlook on life. I have not only gained employability skills but built friendships and a social life all thanks to the programme".

Some £5.7 million has also been invested in early intervention projects across the social investment fund zone, and it is providing a range of family support interventions in schools and communities to support physical, intellectual, social and emotional development. Almost 1,300 participants are already availing themselves of the services, and many are sharing positive examples of how the support has helped them.

The Member is right: we need to learn from those experiences and continue to work with communities, particularly communities in disadvantaged areas.

2.15 pm

Programme for Government: Update

3. **Mr Smith** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government. (AQO 238/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government framework agreed by the Executive on 26 May 2016 sets out the ambition that the Executive have for all in our society. Its focus is on the major societal outcomes that the Executive want to achieve and provides the basis for the actions that we propose to take over the course of this Assembly mandate to bring about the conditions of well-being that we are seeking for our people.

Over the summer, a public consultation process was conducted to seek views on the approach taken in developing the framework as well as on its content. There were over 800 responses to the consultation, and, in addition to informing thinking on the shape of the Programme for Government, they were most helpful

in developing the delivery plans needed to achieve the Executive's desired outcomes. We are grateful to all the individuals and stakeholders who contributed to the consultation and welcome the overwhelming support shown across all sectors for the adoption of an outcomes-based approach to the new Programme for Government.

The Executive are now finalising their delivery plans, and they will be incorporated in the detailed programme that we aim to publish for further public consultation over the autumn period. We anticipate finalising the programme by the end of the year.

Mr Smith: I thank the Minister for his answer. Is the Finance Minister's proposal for a one-year Budget now agreed Executive policy? If so, what will be the impact on the Programme for Government?

Mr McGuinness: Everybody will appreciate that the Brexit vote puts us in a completely different situation. Yes, the decision by the Finance Minister to go for a one-year Budget has been endorsed by the Executive. We think that it is a sensible procedure, given the uncertainty that overhangs everything that we are dealing with at the moment as a result of Brexit. The big challenge for us is to ensure that, during that year, we are able to deliver the first-class public services that we are committed to delivering for all our people and, at the same time, try to manage our Budget in a way that allows us to be involved in other initiatives, which the community expects.

Mr McPhillips: A key commitments of the draft Programme for Government framework is to tackle regional imbalance in job creation and investment. Coming from Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I could rightly say that I feel that our constituency has suffered greatly over the years. Some 12 months ago next month, 800 Teleperformance jobs were announced for Enniskillen; to date, I have no knowledge of any job creation in that respect. Will the Minister give us an update on the position with those 800 Teleperformance jobs?

Mr McGuinness: We are not the employers, so we are not responsible for delivering when a company makes a public declaration of investing in an area and outlines how many people it intends to employ. Obviously, there has been some delay, but there has been no suggestion that I have heard of any renegeing on the commitment. I work on the basis that, until such times as people indicate that they are no longer prepared to go along with it, it will go ahead. Hopefully, it can be expedited as quickly as possible.

The issue of regional imbalance is something that we are acutely aware of, particularly as the First Minister is from the south-west and I am from the north-west. We are all conscious of the need to ensure that every area gets a fair opportunity to profit and benefit from the Programme for Government and the Budget that will be aligned with it.

Mr Stalford: Can the deputy First Minister confirm that, in the process of consultation for this Programme for Government, this is the highest level of engagement there has been in the history of drafting a Programme for Government and that, by allowing groups to comment on the draft framework and then the draft programme, we are effectively giving consultees two bites of the cherry in making their views known?

Mr McGuinness: Yes, that is an important point that the Member has raised. Obviously, it is hugely important in

putting a Programme for Government together that there is the widest consultation possible. On this occasion, we are going for an outcomes-based approach. That has worked in Scotland, in various states in the United States of America and in Finland, for example. The fact that the consultation we had with stakeholders recorded huge support for that approach is quite striking when you consider that some political parties in the Assembly who are in opposition railed against it. That clearly shows them to be at odds with where the stakeholders and the general public are. Giving people two bites of the cherry is important, because it really shows people in the community that we are listening very carefully to what they have to say.

Mr Lynch: Will the deputy First Minister outline the next steps to be taken in the PFG process?

Mr McGuinness: We are finalising our delivery plans, and we aim to complete that work in the next few weeks. The delivery plans will be incorporated into the next draft of the Programme for Government, and a revised and expanded document will then issue for further public consultation.

A key feature of this Programme for Government is its dependence on collaborative working between organisations and across sectors. It is also a programme in which individuals and communities can play an active part. There have been extensive engagements already with organisations, groups and individuals, and the First Minister and I are keen that that process continue. I encourage everybody — individuals and organisations — to get involved and put their views forward. Departments will continue to engage with delivery partners and stakeholders throughout the autumn with a view to refining and enhancing the delivery plans and ensuring that the final Programme for Government is as robust and complete as possible. Our aim is to finalise the new Programme for Government and have it endorsed by the Assembly before the end of the year.

Mrs Long: I note that the deputy First Minister — perhaps this week we should refer to him as “Your Highness” — has said it is important that we have outcomes-based measures. We agree with that as a party and believe it is the right approach. One way of ensuring that outcomes are met by Departments is to make sure that the quarterly monitoring rounds are used effectively by Committees to measure whether Departments have met the targets they set. Can the Minister reassure us that the quarterly monitoring rounds will continue to be presented to Committees, as there appears to have been a problem with that over the June monitoring round?

Mr McGuinness: Obviously, there was a problem over the June monitoring round. We will do everything in our power to ensure that we meet the requirements of the Committee. Obviously, we have a challenging situation before us in relation to the outcome of Brexit, for example. Clearly, however, it is important as we go forward that the Programme for Government and the Budget meet the needs of the Committees of the Assembly. I, for one, am very determined that the Committees are accorded the respect they deserve. They are as much a part of the process as anybody else, and it is very important that they have an input into what we are trying to do.

As for “Your Highness”, the less said about that the better.

Mr Allister: If the implementation of the Programme for Government requires any fresh legislation on any subject, will the introduction and processing of that be left to the House — this legislative Assembly — or does the deputy First Minister anticipate again donning his royal persona and changing legislation by royal prerogative?

Does the deputy First Minister intend to further abuse the royal prerogative by usurping the legislative functions of the House?

Mr McGuinness: I suppose that the Member is speaking about the appointment of David Gordon. For me, that is not the issue here. The issue is the relationship and the new dynamic of politics. Some Members would do well to remember that the world extends well beyond the gates of Stormont. We are committed to creating and attracting new and better jobs, improving our public services, investing in our schools, hospitals and roads and supporting the most vulnerable across society.

It would appear, though, that some Members of the Opposition have only woken up with the appointment of a press secretary. There was absolutely no secrecy or underhand dealings. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Allister: Except when you changed the law.

Mr McGuinness: Some minority Members can laugh all they like, but the appointment of the press secretary was legally compliant. We have 55 press officers working in Government press offices — *[Interruption.]* — Yes, 55 — not the inflated figure that some others are trying to use. Perhaps if people asked a question rather than running to the media, they might get to the truth, or maybe they do not like or want the truth.

The important thing is that we are continuing to move forward. I have been made aware within the last half hour that the prerogative powers in section 23(3) have been used on a number of occasions. Amongst the Orders that were found was the Commissioner for Public Appointments (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2001, which was signed by David Trimble and Séamus Mallon.

Mr Speaker: Before I call Mr William Humphrey for the next question, I remind Members that it is a constituency-specific question.

Urban Villages: Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan Urban Villages project. (AQO 239/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will ask junior Minister Fearon to answer this question.

Ms Fearon: Strategic frameworks for all five Urban Villages have been launched. These have been shaped by local communities and reflect their ambition to realise the full potential of the people and places where they live. The frameworks identify collaborative opportunities in each area and provide a road map for a comprehensive and joined-up approach by Departments and wider stakeholders to build community capacity, foster positive community identities and improve the physical environment. In Ardoyne and greater Ballysillan, this means a planned £300,000 investment in this financial year in a range of public realm and environmental

improvements. This includes starting work on a new play park in the Glenbryn estate.

Work is also ongoing to shape community-based projects to enhance local partnerships and find better ways of working together. This year, in Ardoyne and Ballysillan, it will include a focus on initiatives supporting education and learning, women as community and peace builders and working with young people. Over the next four years, subject to final budget decisions, we expect a substantial programme of capital investment in Urban Villages, which would see in the region of £45 million in total delivered in partnership with other Departments and councils. Crucially, the strategic framework will help to align efforts by a range of stakeholders across all Urban Village areas and enable current and future investment to be delivered in more effective and sustainable ways.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. Will she expand on the £45 million investment and the larger investments that there will be in community infrastructure and capital investment? Is there a timescale for the completion of the investment, which I welcome? Both areas are hugely deprived and are in much need of that investment.

Ms Fearon: I thank the Member for his question. Hopefully, by the end of this year, there will be a spend of £3.6 million in capital and £1.6 million in resource and in supporting local projects to enable each of the areas to get ready for the delivery of the overall Urban Village project. We hope that £300,000 will be spent in Ardoyne and Ballysillan, in particular, by the end of the current financial year. Some of the projects that are being considered in those areas are remedial works at the Crumlin Road and Ligoniel Road junction, a play park in the Glenbryn neighbourhood and improvements to the Marrowbone Millennium Park, such as landscaping and a play area, which will enhance service provision there. There are other works in Ballysillan Park, including new surfaces, planting, signage and public art.

Urban Villages are part of a bigger strategy, and I look forward to support from all political representatives for every single headline commitment under T:BUC, and that includes barrier removal. I am very happy to speak to the Member about that as well.

2.30 pm

Mr Speaker: We have time for a quick question from Carál Ní Chuilín and a quick response from the Minister.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Further to the response to William Humphrey's follow-on question, will the Minister outline the importance of community participation in the Urban Villages and T:BUC programmes?

Ms Fearon: I thank the Member for her question. The Executive's endorsement of the Urban Villages framework last week was hugely important and now allows Departments to work together in a truly collaborative way to deliver on that initiative. Engagement with communities is absolutely key, and the local reference groups have been key to advancing that. They have a function to keep all stakeholders updated on the progress of each of the projects. Experience shows us that we achieve better outcomes and better progress when we involve and engage with local people and allow them to be involved in decision-making, particularly when those decisions affect

their everyday lives in their area. We are very committed to building on the foundation of community participation and on the momentum of T:BUC, which has really taken off in recent times.

Community involvement is particularly important when we are engaged in a process of community transformation and our work to build a better future, whether that be barrier removal, like that on the Crumlin Road earlier this year, or the huge participation across the North in our summer camps. Later this week, the Executive will host the Belfast launch of the Urban Villages framework, and I am sure that Members across the House will be welcome to attend to show their support for the initiative.

Mr Speaker: That ends the period for listed questions. We now move to 15 minutes of topical questions.

David Gordon: Powers of his Role

T1. **Mrs Dobson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm the powers that David Gordon will have in his role as the Executive's press secretary that, as a civil servant, Stephen Grimason did not. (AQT 176/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: It is not a matter of what powers David Gordon will have. His responsibility, as a spokesperson for the Executive, will be to work very positively and constructively with everybody in the executive information service (EIS). It really does not concern me whatsoever, because I am absolutely convinced that the EIS and David Gordon will work very positively together, keeping in mind their job description, which is about presenting for public consumption all the tremendous work being done by the Executive and individual Ministers, and also putting the Assembly in a good light. It brings a different dimension and level of expertise to what is a very challenging job.

Mrs Dobson: There is certainly a lesson on how to spin a spin doctor. However, as we know, the role was created using the royal prerogative. Will you, as a proud republican, confirm how you feel about exercising the powers of a monarch?

Mr McGuinness: I feel grand — absolutely grand. *[Laughter.]* Anything that benefits the working of the Executive and, by extension, enriches the lives of the people whom we represent is a good thing. I have done many things over the last 20 years, none of which I am ashamed of whatsoever, because I think that my contribution to this process has put us all where we are today. We have some catcalling from Members on the Back Benches, but they should remember that they would not be sitting on the Back Benches were it not for the work that I and others in Sinn Féin and republicanism have been involved in.

I am not in the least concerned about the debate around David Gordon's appointment. As far as I am concerned, looking at the way that this has developed, mostly on social media, I see that it is all about the anoraks. It is all about the Opposition. We were criticised, when we had a five-party coalition, for being dysfunctional and unable to take decisions. Now, we have a two-party coalition, and we are taking decisions, and we are being criticised. The Opposition parties need to remember this: we will take more and more decisions, and we will show that we can work together as political parties.

We will leave the Opposition parties, who were very quick to jump out of the Executive because of the very poor elections that they had, in our trail.

Dementia Services: Delivering Social Change

T2. **Ms Bunting** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what the Executive Office has put in place in the dementia services strand of Delivering Social Change, especially because, at the weekend, she had the privilege of participating in the Alzheimer's Society's memory walk at the Stormont estate, at which it was clear from the numbers present just how many people that horrible disease impacts. (AQT 177/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: The previous First Minister Peter Robinson and I were very much involved in that announcement. Atlantic Philanthropies was also very much involved in contributing to it. The Member is absolutely right. The whole issue of dementia and Alzheimer's represents a huge challenge to not just our health service but our society as a whole and will continue to do so in coming years. Of course, great efforts are being made to try to find a cure. Huge expenditure is going in to assessing whether it is possible to find a cure and the type of drugs that are required to slow down the onset of these terrible diseases.

There was also a very well-attended walk in the Derry area. Martina Anderson, our locally elected MEP whose mother suffers from this, was there with the entire family. No family is untouched by this. There is a huge responsibility on all of us to do everything in our power to ensure that our lights in the Assembly and the Executive are contributing to what must be an overall effort to find ways forward that relieve the burden on families and the suffering of patients.

Ms Bunting: What do you anticipate will be the tangible impacts of what you have outlined for people who suffer from dementia and their families?

Mr McGuinness: The tangible impact has to be how we can relieve people's suffering and help those who care for them. We all have a responsibility, and Michelle O'Neill, our Health Minister, and the various stakeholders who contributed to the discussion around the Programme for Government continuously explore what more we, as an Executive and an Assembly, can do to contribute in a positive way towards relieving people's suffering. That obviously represents a huge challenge for us, but larger countries than ours and people with much more expertise are working day and daily to find a way forward on this. Every couple of months, you hear about new developments that require years of testing. In the meantime, we will just have to ensure that we contribute in the best way that we can. The project that we were involved in with Atlantic Philanthropies is benefiting people here to some degree.

NI Executive: Message Management

T3. **Mr Aiken** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that it was good to hear the deputy First Minister talk about the world outside Stormont, what further advice can be expected from Kim Jong-un on message management in the Northern Ireland Executive. (AQT 178/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: The Ulster Unionist Party went into opposition at the time of the last Assembly, and it was not the only party to do so. I think that that sort of language really does not reflect the importance of the work that we are doing in the Assembly. There were many remarks like that prior to the election. They came mainly from the Opposition parties and were pitched at the electorate, but they did not work. When it came to the election, the people of the North of Ireland decided that they wanted Sinn Féin and the DUP to be in the lead. They have more faith in us than the opposition parties have. I will not rise to that sort of language. It is silly and childish and certainly shows how distant some of the opposition parties have become from the people. It is only a few months since the election. People gave us a tremendous endorsement. They put their faith in us to take this process forward. Of course, we know that, because they did not get the result that they wanted, the opposition parties did not come into the Executive and they hope that, by staying out, they will make gains between now and the next Assembly election. God help them.

Mr Aiken: Yes. Can the deputy First Minister — thank you for those words — give an assurance that the appointment of David Gordon — *[Interruption.]* — has been conducted — listen — within the correct employment and equality legislation and that, as a member of the Government, he will be appropriately security-vetted as he will have access to classified and commercial-in-confidence documentation? Will the deputy First Minister confirm to the Assembly that the appropriate due diligence has been carried out?

Mr McGuinness: I wonder whether people who were appointed as advisers to the Ulster Unionist Party during the last term of the Assembly were security-vetted by anyone and, if not, why there was no demand from the Ulster Unionist Party for that. This is all nonsense, folks. It is all a two-day wonder. The reality that you have to deal with is that David Gordon will soon be in post. We have every confidence in his ability to do the job. The fact that he is going to do the job is what is scaring the opposition parties more than most.

Hate Crime: Executive Office Action

T4. **Mr Frew** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what the Executive Office is doing to reduce hate crime, encourage community relations and reassure members of the public, given that, this morning, the BBC's 'Good Morning Ulster' reported a hate crime incident at a tourist spot in the North Antrim constituency. (AQT 179/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: I absolutely and roundly condemn any hate crime anywhere. I am sure that it is not just restricted to the Member's constituency. We have it in probably every constituency throughout the North. The First Minister and I were delighted last week to attend and speak at the inaugural meeting of the new racial equality subgroup, which was very well attended. We are very conscious of the need to ensure that we give as much support as possible to people who have been targets of racist thugs. There is a huge responsibility on our police service to ensure that it is very proactive in trying to apprehend those who are involved in criminal and cowardly attacks on defenceless people. Working with the police and the representatives of our ethnic communities, it is very

important that we continue to stand together and send out a very clear message that such behaviour is absolutely despicable and should stop.

Mr Frew: Thank you, deputy First Minister. He will be aware of the work of the Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum in the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council area. Whilst the figures for hate crime have risen by something like 87% in the last five years, they have reduced dramatically in Ballymena and east Antrim. What more support can the Executive Office give to groups like the Ballymena Inter-Ethnic Forum to assist them in their work?

Mr McGuinness: We will give every support. I want to pay tribute to that group for the tremendous work that it is involved in. I know that, in every part of the North of Ireland, people from the unionist and republican/nationalist communities are working together to send out a very powerful message to our ethnic minorities that they are hugely respected, much loved and make a massive contribution to and enrich our society. Our meat processing and agrifood industry would come to a halt if those people withdrew their labour and went back to their own countries. It is hugely important that we do everything in our power to support local communities that recognise the massive contribution that they make. Of course, we have policies and strategies, such as the racial equality strategy and others, but we also have to work with the police to ensure that we continue to bear down on people — it is only a tiny minority in our society — who believe that it is OK to say “bravo” to attacking somebody who is thousands of miles from their own country and is basically defenceless.

I have great faith that our people in the unionist and in the nationalist/republican communities will continue to work together to defeat those people.

2.45 pm

Paramilitary Organisations: Disbandment

T5. **Mr Anderson** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on disbanding paramilitary organisations. (AQT 180/16-21)

Mr McGuinness: I think that everybody knows that, during the Fresh Start negotiations, the political parties, mainly the DUP and Sinn Féin, came to an agreement. We established a three-person panel to bring forward a strategy. It is a strategy that we have accepted in total and are absolutely committed to implementing.

That work will roll out over the next while. Of course, working closely with the Police Service, it is very important that we send a clear message to the tiny minority that exists in our community that being involved in criminality or paramilitary activity of any description is a total abhorrence to the people who want to get on with their lives and build a better future for their children. The work that was done was good work. A report was published with many proposals, all of which have been accepted by the First Minister and myself, and that will be a huge benefit to the people whom we represent as it is rolled out.

Mr Speaker: Time is up. We do not have time for a supplementary question. I ask Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

Infrastructure

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Taxi Legislation: Update

1. **Mr Douglas** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the review of taxi legislation. (AQO 251/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): Following my meeting on 3 August with a new taxi group established in the North, I made clear my intention to deal as quickly as possible with this legacy issue. It is vital that there is clarity for consumers and those in the taxi industry on the way forward, and my decision to instruct my officials to commence work immediately on a review demonstrates my commitment to finally putting in place a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of consumers here.

I have also been aware that rumours are being spread among taxi operators and drivers that the requirement to have an approved meter and printer is being scrapped. Let me reiterate that that is not the case and that the legislative requirement to have an approved meter and printer installed in all class-A and class-B taxis remains in place. My officials have also commenced work to set up a taxi forum, which will include statutory bodies, stakeholders from across the taxi industry and consumer groups. That group will help to inform the content of the review and how it will be progressed.

I trust that Members, those in the taxi industry and other key stakeholders are now left in no doubt that I intend to ensure that, at the end of the review process, we will put in place a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of local people and those who visit this part of Ireland.

Mr Douglas: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will he agree with me on the importance of communicating the proposed changes to taxi drivers and operators? There is also an October deadline for some taxi drivers. Maybe the Minister would respond to that.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. I agree entirely. I was very clear in the summer when I met the operators and went to the public to lay out my concerns about the legacy issues that we took on. I was also very clear today, and I think that people will understand that the date is still in place and that there will be no further periods of grace. I will meet officials in the morning to discuss enforcement issues and the best way forward for those who, through no fault of their own, given the huge scale of those applying, have not been able to put a meter in place. Let the message be very clear: meters and printers will be part of our taxi industry going forward.

Ms Mallon: I record my apologies for not being in my seat last week when called for a topical question to the Health Minister.

Can the Minister outline how changes to legislation may impact on the operation of Uber in the greater Belfast area?

Mr Hazzard: I do not intend to take action in relation to any particular industry, such as Uber. Like every taxi operator in the North, Uber must adhere to the law. I understand that, along with some others, it has adopted class-C licences for at least some of its taxis. As I intend to take action to ensure that the scope of the class-C licence reflects the original policy intentions, all those using class-C licences will have to comply with the requirements of class C.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister give an assurance that he will look at the issue of new taxi drivers, in particular, wanting to sit the examination? If he speaks to his officials about it, he will be aware that I have had meetings with them recently about this — I appreciate the help that they have given. There is a concern, however, that the current process to ensure that the system is open and transparent is not working in the best way that it possibly could.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question? That is a very long question.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister look at the test to ensure that taxi drivers are given the appropriate test for the best possible outcome?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call the Minister, I ask Members to make their questions brief.

Mr Hazzard: I agree entirely. It is one of the issues that I discussed with industry stakeholders. I believe that there is an employment opportunity here, if it is got right. Some small changes can be taken on board, and my officials are looking at it.

Mr McAleer: The Minister is clearly aware that the misuse of the class-C licence is causing a great deal of grievance among many taxi operators. What steps is he taking to address the issue of class-C licences?

Mr Hazzard: I am very aware of concerns about how class-C licences are being adopted for what might be termed “normal taxis”. The class-C licence was designed for use by special or novelty vehicles such as limousines and wedding cars. It was not intended for use by normal taxis. As a result, I have instructed officials to examine the issue with a view to keeping the scope of the class-C licence as intended in the Taxis Act 2008, and I expect action to be taken in the very near future to achieve this.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for his answers. He has part-answered my question with regards to vintage wedding cars and drivers. Given the mess left behind by the previous Minister, will he guarantee that, in this mandate, he will resolve the issue and sort out the nonsense?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments. I am certainly determined to do my best to ensure that our taxi industry meets the needs of the industry and consumers alike. That is very achievable in partnership with my officials and the new taxi stakeholder group.

Flooding: High-risk Areas

2. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on his Department’s contingency plans for flooding in identified high-risk areas. (AQO 252/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has a major emergency response plan that provides the overarching framework

for the strategic management and coordination of a major emergency such as significant flooding. There are close working relationships across government in the area of flood management, and I am keen to see them enhanced going forward. They should be further strengthened now that the three organisations involved in flood management — Rivers Agency, NI Water and Transport NI — are all within my Department. My Department is the lead Department for the coordination of the emergency response to flooding and makes other organisations aware of the risks, allowing them to be prepared to react to a flood event. Rivers Agency, NI Water and Transport NI all have specific arrangements to deal with flood emergencies, and these include liaison with the Met Office, placing staff on standby, managing their drainage assets during a flood event and carrying out preventative maintenance to grilles. The flooding incident line is also available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to facilitate public requests for assistance. By working together across government and with communities, we can be better prepared for flood events in the future.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his answer. He will be aware of the devastation caused to my constituents and businesses in Upper Bann by flooding over the new year period, specifically along the lough shore at the Kinnego marina and in the Maghera/Birches area of Portadown.

What assurances and comfort can you give to those people, businesses and rural dwellers that, if a similar or worse situation were to develop this year or further into the future, sufficient contingency plans have been put in place?

Mr Hazzard: The Member will be very aware that, when we deal with major flooding incidents, it is a matter not of “if” but of “when”. With climate change and the very nature of weather, it is not something that we can stop, but we have to manage it. The Member will also be aware of the Alan Strong review: he is a highly acclaimed civil engineer who has compiled an extensive and detailed report that I am due to see shortly. I have no doubt that it will plot out not only the pitfalls and strengths of the 2015-16 winter floods but the best road map for going forward. I look forward to receiving the report shortly. No doubt the Member will have an interest in it, too.

Mrs Barton: Thank you, Minister, for the money that was made available to Transport NI in County Fermanagh to help alleviate some of the flooding. What extra finances were allocated directly to Rivers Agency in its quest to alleviate future flooding through managing the drainage system?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member very much for her question and her kind regards. I am travelling to Fermanagh this week to have a look at some of the remedial work that has taken place to future-proof some of the transport corridor roads and infrastructure in Fermanagh that was badly hit, as you made reference to. I do not have the specific financial information in front of me, but I am more than happy to correspond with the Member.

Mr Boylan: What arrangements are in place to communicate with local government?

Mr Hazzard: Where an emergency response to significant flooding is necessary, council-led subregional emergency preparedness group meetings or conference calls can set up a team to provide interagency coordination for those involved in the response. Those forums provide wider

situational awareness, inform mutual decision-making, facilitate the easy exchange of information and coordinate the multi-agency response across the affected areas.

A26 Improvements

3. **Mr Swann** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed improvements to the A26 from Ballee Road roundabout to Dunsilly roundabout. (AQO 253/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Road safety is one of my Department's key priorities. In the light of the recent fatalities along that stretch of road, Transport NI carried out a review of safety in consultation with the PSNI, looking at the collision history and the causation factors identified. The review made a number of recommendations, which are now being followed through.

My Department is currently consulting on proposals to prohibit right turns out of Woodgreen Road, Maine Road and Cromkill Road on to the A26 Lisnevenagh Road. I understand that there are some objections to the proposals that will have to be addressed. That will delay progress for a number of months and will potentially prevent the prohibitions being implemented. Some work has already been completed to renew white lines at junctions and provide new direction arrows. New warning and direction signage has also been designed and procured and is expected to be installed before the winter season. The remaining works to renew advance direction signs, warning signs, cat's eyes and lines and to cut back vegetation growth are planned to begin shortly and continue over the following months.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for his update. I am sure, from that detailed response, that he will be aware specifically of the Woodgreen junction and the work that is needed there. It experiences a disproportionately high number of fatalities per road accident and per traffic movement. He said that some of the proposals from his Department had met with objections, which is holding back the road, but will he not acknowledge that they are not objections but merely responses to the consultation that his Department asked for, where locals have input on what they think may be a better fit?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his answer, and I take on board his comments. When we go out to consultation, we want to ensure — I am adamant about this — that road safety is a priority for us. We want to take on board everything that is said during the consultation project. We need to bear it in mind that, where there are objections, we have to look at them. We have a legislative duty to do so. I am more than happy to meet or correspond with the Member in that regard in the future.

3.00 pm

Mr Mullan: Minister, you will be aware that the new road has been diverted west. Will you update us on what will happen to the old road and the surrounding land?

Mr Hazzard: Thanks very much for the question. I am not actually aware of the road the Member refers to. I do not have that information in front of me, but I am certainly more than happy to correspond with him on it.

Mr Frew: The Minister has already outlined the fact that his Department is consulting some of the objectors. I have

facilitated some meetings with officials from Transport NI. One of the concerns I have is that it is meeting individual objectors, as opposed to having a public meeting where they may be able to address more concerns more quickly —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr Frew: — in order that this would be placed on the ground as quickly as possible. I fear there could be more fatalities. Can the Minister give an assurance that this will be on the ground as quickly as possible?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member. He should rest assured: we want to get to the same place as quickly as possible. I have to put it on record that, if the objections are not withdrawn, it is likely the proposals will be subject to a public inquiry, so you will very much have that public sphere. The only outcome of that, of course, is that you will delay the implementation of the scheme by at least a year.

Mr Allister: It is over 18 months since the sad fatality of the young married woman at Woodgreen cross gave rise to the review, yet, 18 months on, we are still having excuses for why action cannot take place.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr Allister: Is there no urgency in the Department to address the issue?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Has the Member a question?

Mr Allister: Why has it not been costed, and why has it taken so long to date?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Can the Member put his question to the Minister, rather than making a statement?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his comments. If he reviews Hansard, he will see that I laid out a number of programmes and schemes that will take place to address some of the concerns. I very much want to see a successful conclusion to this, one that makes these roads safer for road users.

Mr Ford: I thank the Minister for his response to Mr Swann's question. Having on one occasion rendered first aid at a thankfully not-quite-fatal accident at Woodgreen, I endorse everything he said. There are other junctions further south, particularly at Tannaghmore and Creavery in the Antrim area, that are almost equally bad: is any action being taken on those?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. Again, although I do not have great detail in front of me about specific junctions, I know a review has taken place over the length of it. I have no doubt that officials have been looking at this. If this is something the Member wants to correspond with me about, I would be more than happy to do so.

Blue Badge Backlog

4. **Mr Humphrey** asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he is addressing the backlog in blue badge scheme renewals. (AQO 254/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Historically, the blue badge unit carried a number of agency staff to assist with application processing. However, in December 2014, due to a ministerial directive,

all temporary staff contracts were terminated as a cost-saving measure. That created a backlog that was not addressed until July 2015, when agency staff were recruited. The unit lost staff under the voluntary exit scheme (VES) in December 2015 and in January and March 2016. Those staff have not been replaced.

The estimated number of blue badges in circulation in 2016 will be over 125,000. Application numbers have increased dramatically since the introduction of the personal independence payment (PIP) earlier this year.

The Department had expected to link to the blue badge service in Britain in April 2016, but no provision was made to allow us locally to access that contract. The situation has now been resolved, and it is hoped we will be allowed to access the service in April 2017. That situation meant that the Department had to locally procure new blank badges to enable it to continue processing. The new blank badges arrived on 7 July 2016, and the process of issuing those held up in the backlog began immediately.

Five agency staff are currently employed to process blue badge applications, with another due to start next week. There are approximately 9,900 applications to be processed. Preference is being given to first-time applications, whilst other cases are dealt with in date order. Applicants who hold an expired badge and have sent in a renewal application are being advised that traffic attendants on streets and in council car parks will not issue parking tickets to any badge displayed that has expired after 1 May 2016. That information is also available to the public on the NI Direct website.

Organisations with responsibilities for disseminating information to hospitals and businesses, including private car park operators, have also been informed about the situation and will be re-notified in mid-September.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive answer. Minister, you will be aware that I wrote to you as Chair of the Committee last week. The Committee discussed this, and there was unanimous agreement on the unacceptable situation that prevails in Northern Ireland. A constituent of mine, Elaine, who wrote to me, actually submitted her application on 4 August but has been told that she will not get it until 17 November.

This is affecting people negatively in Northern Ireland. If people really need to be able to park in a disabled space —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Does the Member have a question?

Mr Humphrey: — it is life-limiting for them. I appreciate that there is extra resource. Will the Minister do what he can to address the issue? It is simply not good enough.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question and the interest that the Committee has shown in the issue. I agree with your sentiments: it is something we need to get through. As I outlined, I think that there is light at the end of the tunnel — April 2017 but the message must go out — I think that it has — that, if applications have expired, people will not be punished. I am more than happy to look at cases that have fallen foul of that.

Mr F McCann: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Many people who got tickets after submitting their applications will welcome that news today. Can we get a constituency-by-constituency breakdown — this was

partially answered for the previous Member — in the near future of what areas have badges?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. I have not seen a constituency-by-constituency breakdown, but I am more than happy to chase that up. We are dealing with approximately 200 applicants a day. Anecdotally, in 1999, you were looking at 12,500 blue badges, and the estimated figure that I outlined is now 125,000. There are many reasons for that huge surge in blue badge applications, but I want to get through the problem and get to the other side.

Ms Armstrong: What consideration has been given or could the Minister give to a customer care charter that confirms that no person with disabilities will in future have to wait more than 30 days for their blue badge to be processed?

Mr Hazzard: That is a new idea to me, and, if the Member wants to correspond with me, I am more than happy to consider it.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Minister for his comprehensive report on delays with blue badges. Minister, I hope that you will agree with me that, if a current holder's badge has expired, although your interventions have allowed that they will not be punished, that does not apply across the border. Anyone travelling across the border cannot use that blue badge without being punished in another jurisdiction. Have we got the resource in place now to make sure that the delays will not be longer than 30 days?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her supplementary question and welcome the Ulster Unionist Party's all-Ireland approach to the issue. I am more than happy to take this up with counterparts in Dublin. As you say, the issue has maybe suffered from the unintended consequences of other initiatives.

Two hundred applications a day, for no matter what size of a team, is a huge amount of work to get through, but, as I outlined to Members on the other side, there is light at the end of the tunnel. As we progress through this, the backlog will be eaten through considerably.

Ticketing: Public Transport

5. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans for ticketing on public transport. (AQO 255/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: This important project has a number of aims: to transform public transport and deliver customer growth in line with a key Programme for Government indicator; to deliver an innovative ticketing system with a focus on integration, flexibility and convenience; and to develop and deliver replacement ticketing equipment and associated systems nearing the end of their useful life, while modernising with additional operational, technical and customer-led enhancements.

Ticketing requirements for the new Belfast rapid transit system will also be delivered through this project. Customers using concessionary fares will continue to avail themselves of them in the new system. The new, modern ticketing system will be equipped with wider-ranging functionality and capabilities and be scalable to allow for integration with other operators.

Expected key benefits include improved bus boarding times; reduced use of cash; improved data and communication channels; integrated travel; rewards for

regular passengers; and simplified and more accessible ticketing for customers.

I recently announced that Parkeon, a global leader in this industry, was awarded the contract to design and deliver the ticketing system in partnership with Translink. Improvements will be seen from 2018.

Mr Milne: Mo bhúiochas fosta leis an Aire. Will integrated ticketing also be available on a North/South basis?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his supplementary. No doubt he will be aware that joint services are currently on offer across the island, but we currently do not have the ability to have joint ticketing arrangements. This facility, while not directly creating the opportunity for integrated ticketing straight away, certainly has the scope to do so. I will pick it up with Southern counterparts as we go forward, and I certainly want to engage in a positive way on the way forward.

Ms Bradshaw: What plans does the Minister have to incorporate into the new ticketing system the needs of post-primary children who use trains and who are not eligible for free transport?

Mr Hazzard: At this stage in the development, we have not looked specifically at that, but the Member has raised an issue that I think warrants further discussion and further scoping. We want to have a shift from the car to rail. We want to expand our rail services, and I certainly want to be able to meet that need. Part of that, of course, is children travelling to school and the opportunities that exist for them to do so by rail. I will look at that in the months ahead.

Mr McNulty: Will the Minister give his assessment of student travel concessions, especially for those at university? Does he think that those concessions are reasonable at present?

Mr Hazzard: Concessionary fares are very important to us, and the Executive have protected them year-on-year. We spend some £40 million a year on concessionary fares. Having student fares is very valuable to our young people, who feel financial pressures from a large number of corners. If we can alleviate some of that pressure by doing all that we can in public transport, I will be more than happy to work on that in the future.

Mr Aiken: I thank the Minister for his comments. I am delighted that the smart card is to be rolled out, but why will it take until 2018? In the Republic of Ireland and in the rest of the United Kingdom, Leap cards and Oyster cards were rolled out within a much shorter period. In particular, I note that many Northern Ireland companies are involved in the development of Leap card, smart card and Oyster card technology. I would like the Minister to assure us that everything is being done to improve the timescale for delivery of this project, because, as I am sure the Minister is aware, by 2018, technology will have moved on.

Mr Hazzard: I am sure that the Member will be well aware that, due to the operational complexities of the project, the need for wider consumer and customer educational experience and the staff training required, technology enhancements will be phased in with a longer run-in. That will give us a far greater adoption of the new era in Translink ticketing. This is not about leaving people behind. There has to be a message that you will still be able to use cash. Some people out there think that we are going

entirely cashless, but that will not be the case at all, so an education process is involved in this. The advance of the Belfast rapid transit system will be very important as we start to roll these out.

Ballynahinch Bypass

6. **Mr Smith** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed Ballynahinch bypass. (AQO 256/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Significant work has been completed on the A24 Ballynahinch bypass to progress the scheme through the preliminary options, preferred option and proposed option scheme assessments. This work enabled the publication of the environmental statement, draft direction and draft vesting orders in March 2015. The former Department for Regional Development received a number of objections during the statutory consultation period for the draft orders, and it was determined appropriate to convene a public inquiry to examine the cases for and against the proposed scheme. The Inquiry was held on 26 and 27 January 2016. The inspector's report of the inquiry was subsequently received in March 2016, and my Department's project development team has considered the report and recommendations and is finalising a report for my consideration. Subject to a satisfactory outcome, my Department will publish the environmental statement notice of intention to proceed and make the direction order for the proposed scheme. I expect that the making of the vesting order for the scheme will be delayed to align with the construction programme for the bypass.

Mr Smith: Thank you for your answer, Minister. When do you believe the Department will be in a position to respond to the inspector's report and will funding be allocated for this essential long-overdue project in the upcoming four-year capital budget?

3.15 pm

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question and for raising the issue. As someone who comes from that part of the world, I would be more than delighted to be able to fund the construction of this very important project in the morning. As you have alluded to, it is something that local populations, including the population of Strangford and south Down, have been looking for. Local campaigners have been campaigning for this for the best part of half a century. I expect the report to be with me very shortly. Regarding the financial situation, while this project is not a flagship programme for the Department, it is something that is very important and I want to see delivered.

Water Infrastructure: Carrickfergus

7. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the impact the new water infrastructure project on North Road, Carrickfergus, is having on local business. (AQO 257/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The replacement of the water main at North Road commenced at the beginning of July and was scheduled to take 14 weeks. From January 2016, NI Water has been in continuous contact with all key stakeholders including elected representatives, schools, private households and businesses to minimise the impact locally. Impacts such as traffic management and providing

sufficient local access were key priorities in the works programme.

The initial phase saw a single lane closure at the Prince Andrew Way junction, followed by a full road closure in both directions from Prince Andrew Way junction to Middle Road. However, this resulted in problems for a number of businesses at the top of the North Road, in Oakland Park, and their concerns were raised during a meeting between a number of local representatives, NI Water and Transport NI. As a result of these discussions, NI Water agreed to reopen a single lane to allow access to the area.

I am happy to report that the work is now substantially complete and there are no further full road closures proposed. The remaining work, to connect the existing customers to the new water main and sewer pipe, can generally be carried out on the road verge and footway. The scheme is expected to be complete by the end of October, well within the original programme.

I would like to thank local businesses and the wider community for their patience and cooperation while this essential work was carried out.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: There is no time for a supplementary question. That ends the period for listed questions and we will now move on to 15 minutes of topical questions. The Member listed for topical question 1 has withdrawn his name.

Pedestrian and Cycle Pathway: Bangor Ring Road

T2. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, assuming he is aware of the recent creation of a lengthy stretch of joint pedestrian and cycle pathway on the Bangor ring road, between the Gransha Road and the Donaghadee Road, on which, last week, directional arrows, accompanied by the outline drawings of a cycle, were painted at regular intervals, directing cyclists to ride on the right-hand side of the cycle pathway as opposed to the accepted rule of the road to ride or drive on the left-hand side, whether this was human error or the result of some technical reason to depart from the Highway Code. (AQT 187/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his very topical question. He will understand that I would need to see some images of what he is talking about to get a good grasp of the situation. I am more than happy to sit down with the Member and have a look at it.

Mr Chambers: I have the images here and they are causing a bit of fun in the Bangor area. Regarding the pathway, cyclists are reluctant to use this particular carriageway due to the amount of road debris and stones being thrown up by vehicles using the very busy ring road. What measures have been put in place, or could be put in place by the Department, to address this problem?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. You have touched on the very important issue of the confidence and ability of local people to go out on their bicycles to commute and to take to our roads in a manner in which they feel safe, and are safe. It is an issue that I have been aware of since coming into post. I will be publishing my greenways strategy shortly and a bicycle network plan for Belfast. My wish and that of my Department is to have as many segregated cycling

pathways as possible. Of course, it comes down to finances at the end of the day. Often, roads with cycling, pedestrian and vehicular traffic are more than safe. However, the message has to go out to all road users to be aware of those beside them — pedestrians, cyclists or those in cars — and to have a little more respect for everybody who uses the road.

City of Derry Airport

T3. **Mr Kennedy** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given the huge financial pressure experienced by local ratepayers and taxpayers over many years in maintaining the City of Derry Airport at Eglinton, whether he and the Executive would consider the sale of the airport to the private sector, where regional airports are normally placed. (AQT 188/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question, and to be very blunt, no, it is not something that I have thought of or am likely to give much consideration to in the near future.

Mr Kennedy: Surely, any responsible Minister in any responsible Executive should at least look at the option to include private management of the airport so that jobs can be protected in what is an essential subregional airport?

Mr Hazzard: I repeat: if the option is sitting in front of me, of course I will look at it, but the option is not sitting in front of me.

A6: Progress

T4. **Mr Middleton** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on progress with the A6 road scheme. (AQT 189/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: With the A6, it is important to say that the vesting orders went out a number of weeks ago. We were at the stage where we were launching the A6 and people in the north-west were delighted that we had got there. We are talking, of course, of the stretch from Randalstown to the Castledawson roundabout. I am delighted to announce also that, in the years ahead, work will continue to advance on the Dungiven bypass towards the city. The period for vesting orders will close next week, and construction will begin in October.

Mr Middleton: I thank the Minister for his response. He will be aware that infrastructure in the north-west is very important to our local economy, and, of course, we welcome the announcement by the Executive Office today about the airport. Can the Minister outline whether he foresees any issues that could possibly delay the upgrade of the A6?

Mr Hazzard: It is important to stress that, as with any large infrastructure project, there are always issues that may cause problems or delays. With the A5 and the A6, as well as any other large infrastructure project that we look to take forward, something is likely to happen. My office received notification this week of the possibility of legal action with regard to the A6, and it is something that officials and I are working through.

Ballyclare and Doagh: Relief Road

T5. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in his capacity as a representative of the premier town in Northern Ireland, Ballyclare, whether the Department

for Infrastructure is undertaking any work to alleviate the infrastructure problems associated with the proposed relief road and the timing of its delivery that are being experienced by Ballyclare and Doagh. (AQT 190/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. Certainly, it is an issue that is close to his heart, and we have chatted about it. As I have outlined before, while there is no specific work going on to look at the distributor road he referred to, it is something that I am more than happy to correspond with the Member on in the years ahead.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for his answer thus far, but the difficulties associated with the relief road mean it could take up to 15 years for development to take place. Is there any possibility that engagement could be taken on with the local authority to take the lead in the delivery of such a major project, but with some payback from the development as it goes forward?

Mr Hazzard: I agree. There are a number of locations throughout the North where local councils stand in a prime position to play a leading role, following the devolution of various powers to them in recent years, such as their capacity for financial borrowing, to give one example. Certainly, either on their own or in conjunction with the Department, and with local developers, there is the potential to look at this. There are a large number of towns where congestion is a problem, and my Department will do whatever it can to alleviate it when looking at the strategic road network, but there are places where the local council can play that role, and I have no doubt that I will work in partnership with them, going forward.

Road Maintenance: Fermanagh

T6. **Mr McPhillips** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on road maintenance work on key Fermanagh roads, given his predecessor's announcement of £1 million to improve flood alleviation measures and drainage systems following heavy flooding last winter. (AQT 191/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I do not have an update on the specific roads that you talked about. Coming into position, it was clear to me that rural roads in particular needed attention. I was delighted to secure the funding to roll out a rural roads initiative where 1,000 rural roads will be involved in a scheme that will see resurfacing and some drainage works, which is very important. Local divisions have been carrying out that work to date and will continue to do so in the months ahead.

Mr McPhillips: I thank the Minister for the answer. As we approach another winter, many residents and road users have been raising concerns with me on a daily basis about the condition of the roads and the state that they will be in in a few months' time. What assurances can the Minister give that planned work will be completed in a timely manner?

Mr Hazzard: As divisions roll out their works programmes, it is important that they do so in a timely way. For want of a better phrase, you get better bang for your buck when you do it when the weather is good. Carrying out such works in the winter is not productive for the Department or local communities, as you suggest.

Brexit: Infrastructure Funding

T7. **Mr Kearney** asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has an assessment of the EU funding likely to be lost to his Department following Brexit. (AQT 192/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department established a Brexit unit in July. The unit has engaged with a number of key stakeholders to identify the most critical issues of concern and to fully understand how those concerns can most effectively be addressed. Only last week, my Department met officials from the Brexit unit in the Department for Transport in London and colleagues from other devolved Administrations. That provided a useful platform upon which to raise awareness of our unique circumstances and challenges, and I have asked my officials to remain active in this respect. I remain determined to pursue all opportunities available to us as members of the European Union. As the overall framework for Brexit begins to take shape, we will continue to actively participate in the European arena. In that regard, we will continue to prepare and present applications for EU funding for major projects where we can. For my Department, it is business as usual.

Mr Kearney: Flowing from your answer to my earlier question, will you detail how you intend to prioritise direct engagement with the European institutions in order to ensure that current funding levels are maintained and that we do not lose our special status as a region with the European Union?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. When the news broke on 23 and 24 June, it was important that all Departments in the Executive and, of course, the Department for Infrastructure, continued to engage directly with Europe. I had been to a TEN-T transport conference in Rotterdam just before that and saw with my own eyes the opportunities that exist. I met the EU Commission in the weeks leading on from that, and, today, I met representatives from Flanders, and it is something that I will continue to do in the weeks ahead. However, as I outlined in my original answer to you, for me and my Department, it is a case of business as usual. We must not let this tidal wave of bad news, when it comes to my Department and Brexit, overcome us. We must stand. There are important infrastructure projects. If we are to priorities places like the north-west and are to continue the modal shift from car to rail, it is important that we do so from a position of business as usual.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Trevor Lunn is not in his place. Alex Attwood has withdrawn question 9.

Magherafelt Bypass

T10. **Mr Milne** asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the completion of the Magherafelt bypass. (AQT 195/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am delighted to announce that the Magherafelt bypass will be open shortly, and, in the next couple of weeks, I will be in that part of the world to meet the divisional team and see the project with my own eyes.

Mr Milne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Will the Minister outline his thoughts on the benefits that the bypass will give not just to the Magherafelt area but to the greater mid-Ulster area, bearing in mind, hopefully, the A6 in the future?

3.30 pm

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. As alluded to in answer to those on the Benches opposite earlier, there are a number of regional towns and locations throughout the North where congestion is bad news for the local economy and local traders who want to see the congestion alleviated and cars flowing in and out — not just for the air quality, but for the local economy. It is something the wider Magherafelt area will be interested in.

Coming into post I was very clear that I wanted to tackle an historical infrastructure deficit in the west, especially west of the Bann. Whereas the Magherafelt bypass has been in the system for years, I think it is an example of the sort of project we want to see rolled out. Going forward, there are other towns, such as Cookstown and Enniskillen, which need similar investment.

Private Members' Business

Used Tyres

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour 30 minutes for this debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes to propose and 10 minutes to wind up. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to wind up. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mr McMullan: I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the dangerous emission of toxic fumes and gases into the atmosphere from the public burning of used car tyres; notes that the residue is sent to landfill and still poses an environmental danger; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to establish a used-tyre register to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.

I accept the thinking behind the amendment, but it is factually flawed. The amendment states that it is the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, when it is actually the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government who regulates waste tyres in the Southern Government.

The motion before us today is one of the most important environmental issues we have to deal with. Used tyres and their overall environmental use, and indeed their misuse, is one of the top discussions in nearly all Government regions, both here and in Europe. It is hard to believe that there is very little, and in some cases no, real effective ongoing regulation. The last figures available for the number of tyres collected for disposal or recycling was 13,370 tons. That sounds a lot, but when you consider tyres from heavy machinery such as tractors, lorries etc and the number of cars we have on the roads, this is indeed a very low number. These figures show the problem that we have with regulation. Furthermore, it is unclear at present whether the NIEA (Northern Ireland Environment Agency) holds its own disposal records.

When a motorist takes his or her car to get a new tyre they are charged approximately £1.50 for a tyre, and when a lorry changes its tyres it is approximately £10-£12: both of these charges are for disposal. This is where the whole issue of regulation starts to fall down. We do not have an up-to-date register to enable us to monitor who has the tyres, who sells the tyres, where the tyres go, who takes them away and where they are taken. More and more tyres are being dumped illegally for burning or just being dumped illegally around the countryside. I am talking about fly-tipping, and still we cannot get the culprits. The legislation on the management of waste is still not clear about the disposal of tyres.

The illegal practice of dumping leads to another problem that affects us all. Cleaning up the residue of burning at illegal dump sites falls into the responsibility of the council. This is where the cost per tyre escalates. The council now has to pay to dispose of the tyres, and therefore the ratepayer foots the bill.

It is at this stage that we see the second charge put on the disposal of the tyre. That is due to little or no regulation.

It is, if you like, a loophole in the law that allows some tyre dealers, carriers, businesses and the general public to increase their profits by avoiding the present method of disposal. When I say "profits", I mean that, from the money that you are charged for your tyre, the tyre dealer is supposed to pay for disposal. Therefore, dealers can accrue quite a bit of money. If they do not dispose of their tyres in the proper way, they can make a lot of money.

Members, tyres are classified as controlled waste, and it falls to the NIEA, which has the responsibility for granting licences:

"to authorise the deposit, treating, keeping or disposal of controlled waste in or on any land, or the treatment or disposal of controlled waste by means of mobile plant."

I go back to what I said. The NIEA is the controlling body for the disposal of controlled waste in or on any land.

Businesses that only transport, broker for or deal in certain types of waste are eligible to register as lower tier. All other businesses must register as upper tier, and that, Members, is where we see one of the best examples of unfairness in the present regulation. If a farmer needs tyres for his silage clamp, for use on his farm, he must apply to the NIEA for a paragraph 16 exemption, which is a three-year permit allowing a farmer to bring tyres on to his land for agricultural use only. Members, the catch in all of this is that that permit will cost the farmer £867. We are told that the cost is for reviewing the application and for a site visit once a year. Members, I ask this question: who else do you know who uses waste tyres has to pay for that privilege?

I return to the subject of regulation. There is no doubt that the current system is complex, bureaucratic and in need of urgent change. On 29 June 2015, a question was asked of the then Environment Minister, Mr Durkan, on:

"what action his Department takes to ensure that company records of tyres that have been taken off customers marry with the records of disposal for those tyres".

The Minister replied that the Member should know:

"the complexity of this area of work and the complications in trying to grasp the issue and deal with it in a conclusive manner."

He went on to state that the NIEA:

"and other areas in my Department are working hard, along with other agencies and jurisdictions, to come up with a producer responsibility scheme for tyres." — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 106, p217, col 1-2].

Members, that answer was given in 2015.

On 28 October 2013, the same Minister had written to the then Chair of the Environment Committee regarding the Department's response to the Committee's final report on used tyres and its 12 recommendations. What has happened since? The answer is nothing. The status quo remains. The criminality around waste tyres continues, and all the time our environment continues to suffer.

I ask the Minister to act on the issue, and there has never been a better time to do so. The Government in the South of Ireland are bringing forward legislation to deal with the

same issue. The issue could also involve the problem of cross-border waste. We know it happens, and I am sure that the Minister is aware of it.

Members, let us not pass up the chance that we have here. We have a chance now to deal with tyres. We need a central register. We need a paper trail from the time a tyre is made to the time it goes from the producer to the wholesaler, the retailer and the man in the street who buys the car. There has to be a paper trail for that tyre. We can do that very easily. There can be a paper trail through VAT or whatever. We have done that with the plastic bag levy. There is a paper trail of sorts there, and it is working very well. We need to do the same with the tyre industry because it is unregulated and, as I say, is causing more and more problems every day. Our environment is suffering, and the people are suffering. How many people out there are suffering from, say, inhaling the fumes from burning tyres?

There are other ways we can be innovative with used tyres, and that will be dealt with by my colleague beside me. It will take commitment from everybody here to buy in to this. We must get commitment from everyone. This is not aimed at any one person or side; this is an environmental issue. In 2016, we still cannot tell anybody where waste tyres are going and how many tyres are being used. We are still dealing with approximate numbers: we think they are here; we think they are there. We cannot go on blaming children for taking tyres out of a yard.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Will the Member bring his comments to a close?

Mr McMullan: Minister, I ask you, with this chance today, to support the motion.

Mr McGlone: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Chomhalta as an rún seo a chur os ár gcomhair. I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "register" and insert

"and to work with the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment to introduce an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres."

I thank the Member for proposing the motion, which has been accepted as a competent motion. On a slight technical issue, the Department we refer to embraces within it the Environmental Protection Agency, which has responsibility for, among other things, environmental enforcement. I am not going to quibble over it; that is just information.

Where our amendment is concerned, we are very supportive of the motion as we believe a used-tyre register should be established as soon as possible to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres. Data on tyres and used tyres could be collected from a number of sources, namely producers, suppliers, used-tyre collectors, authorised treatment facilities and licensed recycling facilities. However, we believe the motion should go further, and we are calling on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to work with her counterpart in the Irish Government to establish an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres.

We are keen to approach the issue on an all-island basis as we believe it makes common sense to cooperate on the matter. I am sure many Members have heard on occasion that it is not unknown for the disposal of tyres to take place, cross-border at different times of the year, irrespective of which festive season it might be or which community might be involved. Orange or green — it does not really seem to make a whole lot of difference to those criminals who hope to dispose of tyres in that manner. It makes common sense to cooperate on the matter, and it is our hope that the Minister works with her counterpart to form a producer responsibility scheme, which would be counterproductive unless, as I outlined, it is introduced in both jurisdictions.

The system of the Irish Government is much the same as the process we have here, whereby wholesalers and retailers must use authorised waste collectors to take away waste tyres and provide details of tyres taken by and transferred to authorised collectors. We recognise that any considerations and change to the scheme or to a mandatory compliance scheme must be subject to review and consultation, but we believe that, if that is the case, the scheme should follow a similar approach to that in the South to help organisations that operate in both jurisdictions.

In the context of used tyres, under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, it is the responsibility of anyone who produces, collects, stores, treats, reuses or deposits waste or used tyres to minimise the risk to the environment, human health and animal welfare.

The storage of used tyres can represent a huge risk to the environment, human health and animal welfare.

3.45 pm

We have seen at first hand that major fire incidents can occur at sites used for the large-scale storage of waste, as we saw fairly recently in Belfast, or used tyres. Everyone should be aware that burning tyres generate extremely toxic fumes and by-products that are very dangerous to human and animal health. Tyre fires can be extremely difficult to extinguish and have been known to burn for many weeks. In addition, when waste tyres are stockpiled, leaching of chemicals onto land and into rivers may also occur, posing a big risk to animal and human health and to our waterways. In particular, tyres pose a considerable risk to the environment and must be handled and disposed of properly. The potential risks are numerous and include the use of waste or used tyres on bonfires, generating toxic fumes. They are dangerous to health, produce unsightly burnt residues, damage properties — as we saw in July in Belfast — roads and open spaces and impact on Northern Ireland's economy; indeed, we saw that in Derry, where the road was significantly affected by one of these bonfires. The leaching of chemicals from stockpiled tyres can have a devastating impact on farmlands. Leaching into local rivers kills the fish and potentially puts our drinking water at risk. The use of unsafe part-worn tyres can cause road traffic accidents that result in serious injury and loss of life.

Under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, it is the responsibility of anyone who produces, stores, collects, reuses or deposits that waste to do so in a way that minimises that risk. In 2013, the Department of the Environment (DOE) and the then Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG) in the Republic jointly

commissioned an all-Ireland used tyre survey, which recommended that consideration should be given to placing additional obligations on producers and suppliers, either through voluntary best practice schemes, which rarely work, or a mandatory compliance scheme.

A further recommendation of that report stated:

“In order to obtain an overall picture of illegal disposal of tyres from Northern Ireland it is recommended that consideration be given to a central recording system to be administered by the DOE or NIEA which would require all public bodies to report the used tyres which are discovered either through illegal dumping, fly-tipping or activities.”

While the motion makes no direct reference to bonfires, it would be very remiss of me to make no mention of the issue. The use of waste and used tyres on bonfires generates toxic fumes that are dangerous to human health, produce those unsightly burnt residues and, as I said, damage properties, roads and spaces. During the respective parading seasons, there were reports of hundreds of tyres appearing on bonfires under the cover of darkness, with the police even placed on high alert at ports to tackle shipments of tyres. Each Member will recognise the impact that burning tyres has on the community. In answer to a written question, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs highlighted her concern about the impact of burning controlled waste in an uncontrolled manner, particularly in those built-up areas. She went on to say that the impacts include potential damage to human health and the environment. Materials such as tyres and treated pallets are burnt, which produces a huge risk to human health and has a detrimental impact on the environment.

We have all seen the black smoke gushing up into the air. We are running around controlling emissions from cars and the like and then we see that. Many people, depending on what season it is, take advantage of all that smoke going up in the air to put their own commercial smoke up into the air. Round and round it goes with no solution. Of course, private property is affected, and the high associated costs of the clean-up are met by ratepayers and taxpayers. In some instances, these activities are associated with low-level criminality and, in certain cases, behaviours that can be antisocial and create or increase tensions between communities.

I am glad to see the line that the Minister has taken and look forward to hearing about the actions that she will develop to manage the disposal of used tyres. I recognise that lead responsibility for bonfire management rests with the councils, but I ask the Minister to follow in the steps of the previous Environment Minister — my colleague Mark H — and work with and support the councils to reduce and, hopefully, ultimately eliminate the burning of tyres on bonfires.

As I said at the beginning, we support the motion tabled by Sinn Féin, but we believe that it can go further. If it goes that little bit further, as our amendment suggests, we can have an all-island approach, and that would help greatly to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.

Mr Irwin: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. In an era when awareness and treatment of the environment are high on the agenda, the issue of what happens to end-of-use tyres is an important one.

When tyres are fly-tipped and, of course, when they are burned, sending toxic fumes and particles into the air, it is a concern for everyone. The previous Committee for the Environment conducted its own inquiry into the management of used tyres in Northern Ireland, and that was a useful piece of work in drawing attention to the issues arising from the thousands of used tyres that accumulate annually in the Province.

I know that, in agriculture, farmers are under duty-of-care rules concerning the use and disposal of tyres. We know that tyres are the most logical system for weighing down a silo cover. Farmers who already have tyres on the farm for that purpose are permitted to keep them, but, should they add to that number, they require an exemption certificate under NIEA regulations for the beneficial use of waste. I add, however, that agriculture is certainly not where the problem lies. The bigger problem arises when large quantities of tyres are dumped by the roadside. I have reported a number of fly-tipping incidents in my constituency. Of course, it then falls to councils to foot the bill for the clean-up and legal disposal of dumped tyres. The other obvious concern is that tyres may end up being burned, either maliciously in an arson attack or in other circumstances. The smoke from the burning tyres poses a serious health risk.

At the moment, tyre suppliers are able to charge a levy to a customer to retain that customer's worn tyres for future disposal by a registered waste tyre disposal company. However, there is no in-depth record created of where the tyre was bought or where it will end up, because there is no requirement to do so. I have read through previous Committee minutes of meetings at which tyre suppliers presented to the Environment Committee, and they appear to want and be willing to respond in terms of a register and having in place a system whereby tyres could be traced to a final destination. There is an issue of what marking would be used as a way of identifying where tyres came from, which supplier distributed them and so on. However, that is not an insurmountable problem.

There are, of course, retailers selling part-worn tyres in Northern Ireland. There are also dismantler yards that accumulate a stock of part-worn tyres for resale. There is no monitoring at all of that type of resale market, and that remains a concern.

With so many tyres being used and disposed of in Northern Ireland and the apparent lack of any form of traceability of their end use, there is certainly a case to be made, along with the full involvement of the tyre trade, for moving towards a system whereby a tyre can be traced from point of sale to a suitable, registered recycling centre. How that is achieved in a way that does not overly hinder the tyre retailers, does not create an overly bureaucratic burden and, importantly, does not add significant cost to the consumer will require much more deliberation. I will be interested to consider the matter in more detail in the AERA Committee.

Mr McKee: Used tyres are an inevitable by-product of our increasing reliance on motor vehicles. The problem of what we do with them once they have reached the end of their roadworthiness is not new. Ten years ago, under the landfill directive, it was rightly decided that it was no longer tolerable to bury these items. Unfortunately, whilst we can all agree on that, getting complete agreement and buy-in on what to do with used tyres has been much more difficult.

Naturally, it costs money to recycle a tyre, and some people have decided that it is not worth abiding by the law. A small minority of people and businesses have decided to blatantly flout the agreements that are in place. Many of them think that it is acceptable to simply dump tyres. Unfortunately, however, it is most often landowners in rural areas who are left to literally pick up the mess after them. It is not unusual to drive around rural roads in a constituency, such as my own of South Down, and see locations where van- or trailer-loads of waste have simply been dumped. Fly-tipping remains a major problem here, with not just tyres but all sorts of other waste finding its way over hedges and lying scattered across fields of grass or crops. This also presents a real threat to livestock. I ask the Minister for an update on the fly-tipping protocol between councils and the NIEA, including which councils have yet to sign up to it.

There remains a major problem with the traceability of tyres coming into Northern Ireland. Has the Department not adopted a system of accurately quantifying the tyres coming into Northern Ireland? I believe that this was a recommendation in a Committee inquiry a number of years ago.

The problem of what to do with used tyres remains. The best environmental solution would probably be to retread or re-groove them, but I understand that the cost of doing so rules this out as a practical solution for everybody. I met a tyre company and was informed that it takes 22 litres of fuel to retread a tyre but 86 litres to manufacture a new one. A problem, however, is that retreading and re-grooving can be applied to commercial vehicles only.

Burning tyres under very controlled circumstances to generate heat is a fairly new idea, with businesses such as that one in Cookstown using progress in technology to do so, and always with an eye on the environmental implications. Recycling old tyres into materials such as crumb rubber looks set to remain the common solution for several years to come. That does, however, produce some residue, which the motion correctly mentions and which, unfortunately, still finds its way to landfill.

One proposal I would like to make to the Minister is this: do not dismiss outright the idea of using old tyres as sea defences. This is an idea with a growing body of support across the UK. Whilst there was a well-known case relating to the north coast in the courts recently, that was because there was no permission for the tyres and not because they were harmful to the sea or land around them. I call on the Minister to task her officials to explore this.

Finally, farmers have found waste tyres to be an effective alternative to silage clamps on manure. Is it not about time that the Minister considered abolishing the current fee of £842 for a three-year paragraph 16 exemption? It is 13 years since the Waste Management Licensing Regulations came into effect, so it is about time that the Minister looked at this issue with some rationality.

Mr Ford: I congratulate Mr McMullan and his colleagues for bringing the motion to the House today. This is clearly an issue of great significance to us, judging by the number of people who are in the Chamber, which is rather more than we generally get for Back-Bench debates.

There is no doubt, as highlighted in the motion, that failure to recycle tyres properly leads to a number of problems, particularly environmental damage but also very significant

potential health damage. We have already heard that even proper landfill of tyres can create toxic effluent. There is no doubt that fly-tipping is a major problem where it involves tyres and other materials but, of course, a lot of the tyres that are not properly disposed of do not go to landfill or fly-tipping. They are frequently burnt in urban areas causing major human health issues. There is not just the short-term nuisance that all of us experience but potentially major chronic problems, respiratory diseases, skin diseases and even effects on the central nervous system. All of those can arise from the burning of tyres, which is another reason why the issue needs to be addressed very seriously.

4.00 pm

Mr McMullan referred to the £1.50 charge for a car tyre, or the higher charge for commercial tyres, that is paid for recycling purposes. He also highlighted, as Mr McKee has just done, the issue of the cost of having an exemption certificate for people who, for example, wish to put used tyres on a silo cover. We all know that the practical reality is that, in many cases, when people pay the appropriate fee to have their old tyres recycled, they are not recycled but go out through the back door to criminal activity and to paramilitary groups and a variety of other people who burn them illegally. That is a key problem that needs to be covered if we are to make any changes in the legislation. We need to ensure that any disposal is done properly and that matters are regulated all the way through. We all know that there are plenty of other uses for waste rubber, whether it is used for safety surfaces in playgrounds, various bits of athletic equipment and even things like carpet underlay, if it is not possible to do the retreading that was referred to earlier.

For me, the key question is this: why is the current system not working and how do we ensure that any changes that we make to it are made to work so that we protect the environment and protect human health? We cannot just assume that another set of regulations will automatically make things better when, unfortunately, the current set of regulations does not work. It seems to me that, at the moment, there is little incentive for people to deal with this waste properly because the penalties are almost non-existent for failing to deal with it properly and, indeed, the charges can be so high for doing things properly.

I probably should not mention in public the advice that I gave to Mr McMullan when this was discussed at the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs a while ago, but the fact is that we all know that illegal burning is going on in huge quantities at particular times of the year, and, unless something is done to stop those tyres going into bonfires, we will see little to improve the environmental or human health aspects.

I am not absolutely sure whether the precise wording of the motion or, indeed, the amendment is absolutely the right way forward, but I am sure that they both hint at necessary action and at the broad point that we need to ensure that we have proper controls of this waste and that it is dealt with in an efficient way that does not allow it to go to fly-tipping, landfill or, worst of all, burning. We need to ensure that we have a proper joined-up approach on a cross-border basis. We are well aware that, in the recent past, in this jurisdiction, waste has been shipped across the border, creating further difficulties for us in Northern Ireland after people have made illegal profits in the

Republic. There is a lot that needs to be done in this area, and I certainly support the principle of the motion and the amendment. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some reassurance as to exactly how she will take things forward from now on.

Mr Anderson: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion on used tyres. The Health Protection Agency reported in 2003 that, in the United Kingdom, more than 35 million tyres are manufactured each year. It also estimated that the number of tyres in use would increase by up to 60% by 2021. The all-island used tyres survey also estimated that, by 2010-11, there were over 18,500 tons of used tyres in Northern Ireland, equating to approximately 1.8 million tyres. It is therefore quite clear that there is a significant amount of used tyres across the country, and that brings great challenges in how we dispose of them and how they are reused and recycled.

We are all well aware that tyres continue to be disposed of improperly across Northern Ireland. In particular, the burning of used tyres poses a health risk, releasing heavy smoke and dangerous chemical substances into the atmosphere. In addition, in recent times, in my constituency of Upper Bann, I have had to deal with a case in which a significant number of tyres were illegally dumped. Thankfully, on that occasion, I was able to liaise with the local council — Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council — to see that the tyres were taken away and properly disposed of.

Unfortunately, however, there are many cases of tyres being dumped. That, along with other examples of fly-tipping, continues to take place to the detriment of areas across Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has an important role to play as we seek to dispose of waste tyres in a proper fashion. As such, it must continue to work in conjunction with tyre retailers to make sure that waste tyres are properly handled and disposed of by licensed waste operators. Where there is evidence of improper disposal, enforcement must be strenuously imposed. I also believe that we must continue to focus our energies on ensuring that a collaborative approach to dealing with used tyres is adopted. Such an approach would not only involve central government and key agencies such as the Northern Ireland Environment Agency but local councils, tyre distributors, tyre retailers, farmers, and the wider community. All those groups should continue to engage with the wider population to ensure that used tyres are properly disposed of, reused and recycled.

In the past, documents have been published — there are many I am sure — such as 'Used Tyres - What's all the Fuss About?', and efforts should be made to highlight to communities the dangers and problems that arise from the burning and illegal dumping of tyres. I believe that the Executive and the business community can help to develop further opportunities for the recycling and reuse of used tyres across Northern Ireland. There are numerous ways in which used tyres can be reused effectively, and, therefore, we must encourage commercial opportunities that focus on reusing and recycling tyres in a variety of ways. We must also help to ensure that proper guidance and direction is given to those who seek to set up businesses and ensure that they do not become unnecessarily burdened or obstructed in their efforts to establish such businesses.

I am of the view that the Department should continue to liaise with other jurisdictions and key stakeholders in the tyre industry to see how effectively we can develop a used tyre register. Clarification would have to be secured on the viability of such a register, and questions arise regarding how it would be policed effectively and what the financial implications might be.

In closing, the issue of used tyres and their disposal is of great importance and one that causes much debate. To have any chance of successfully reducing the number of tyres, we should continue to work with all key stakeholders on that issue. As we go forward, there needs to be a willingness for cooperation to improve our chances of success. As I said, we must try to provide additional opportunities to recycle and reuse tyres and to engage with the community to deter the burning and illegal dumping of tyres, which are harmful to people and to the natural environment. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

Ms Archibald: I speak in support of the motion and the amendment. I welcome the opportunity to contribute. My party colleague Mr McMullan has outlined the background, and we have heard from several of my Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs colleagues on why this is a very important topic for discussion.

As we have heard, the illegal dumping and burning of tyres has a very negative impact on the environment. Tyres that are illegally dumped are a significant environmental concern, even directly on land, because, while they can remain intact for decades, some of the components can degrade and toxic additives can leach into the ground. There is also a concern about tyre fires, with the acrid smoke containing many hazardous chemicals, including carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide and many others. The residue from those burnt tyres can cause the contamination of land and water from the phenolic compounds, heavy metals and the significant quantity of oil that is released through burning.

Members, we must take all possible steps to ensure that that type of environmental contamination is reduced and eliminated. The motion calls on the Minister to look at the establishment of a used tyre register to improve the regulation of the tyre industry to make it easier to monitor and regulate the disposal of tyres. Indeed, measures should be looked at that would trace tyres from manufacture to end of life and make it more difficult to dispose of them illegally.

One example of this type of producer responsibility measures has already been implemented for waste electrical and electronic equipment. Responsibility is placed on manufacturers and importers to maintain records regarding the amount of material placed on the market and to arrange for the recovery and treatment of waste. Those principles could be applied to waste tyre regulation.

In the South, following the publication of a report on the current system for managing waste tyres, which showed an apparent failure to comply with regulations, a lack of accurate data being recorded and between 25% to 50% of waste tyres being unaccounted for, the Minister has announced the introduction of a full producer responsibility initiative. Lessons could quickly be adopted from that initiative and a similar scheme introduced in the North.

Indeed, these measures were included in the Environment Committee's 2013 report on its inquiry into used tyre disposal, which recommended the introduction of producer responsibility schemes, coordinated North and South for greatest effectiveness. We therefore urge the Minister to work with her Southern counterpart on this.

Waste management in general poses a significant challenge as we attempt to meet targets on landfill reduction through increased recycling and reuse. That should be our focus for waste tyres. We have already heard from other Members on the potential uses of tyres through remoulding and retreading or in artificial sports surfaces and playgrounds. I do not particularly advocate their use in furnaces, but it has to be acknowledged that tyres and tyre chips have a calorific content that exceeds that of coal, and a similar or lower sulphur content. Tyres have also been used, with varying degrees of success, as underwater reefs, where a large quantity of tyres is bound together and dropped into the ocean to act, like a reef, as a habitat for breeding fish and crustaceans. As tyres are relatively stable in water, there is also the potential for use as river and coastal defences, as previously mentioned.

The use of waste or end-of-life tyres should form part of the strategy to monitor and control distribution and disposal. The aim should be to encourage, or even incentivise, producers and distributors to recover waste tyres to put them to other uses, and to make it easier for those who want to be involved in processing what would otherwise be waste. As we look to develop our policies and encourage environmental protection, waste management is a vital part of any environmental strategy or policy. We should be as innovative as possible in our approach, and that is what we are calling on the Minister to do in today's motion.

Mr Poots: This issue has caused problems for a number of years. Thankfully, it is not as big a problem now as it was. Considerable work has been going on to reduce the problem.

Mr Ford mentioned tyres burning at particular times of the year. Perhaps he is a bit out of touch, because the burning of tyres on bonfires around the eleventh night is considerably less common now than in the past; the vast majority of bonfires do not now burn tyres. However, a few years ago in Londonderry 90,000-odd tyres were burnt on one occasion. It was nothing to do with loyalism or bonfires. People were being paid —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: Yes, I will in a moment.

People who were being paid to collect used tyres and were not disposing of them properly caused huge environmental damage, both to the air and our waterways, through the burning of the tyres.

Mr Beggs: I thank the Member for raising the issue. My understanding is that at Campsie between half a million and one million tyres were burnt, and that someone might well have become a millionaire as a result.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for that information. That sort of thing is wholly unacceptable. When we get a tyre changed on our vehicle, we pay the company an extra £1 or £2 to dispose of it in a proper fashion. The people

who collect those tyres from licensed tyre dealers should therefore be doing their job properly.

The crux of the problem with used tyres is that there may well be individuals — I know that, in the early days, it was very common, and the Minister can inform us of how successful clamping down on all this has been — who are taking money for disposing of tyres but not doing so properly.

4.15 pm

There are so many opportunities to dispose of tyres in a safe manner. The science has moved on. Pyrolysis and all those things enable us to dispose of tyres in a way that recycles the material for further use, whether in playgrounds or at equestrian facilities. Those are good things. I know that, at one stage, Lafarge wanted to burn tyres with flue liners and so on to ensure that the environment was not damaged, but the process with the NIEA seemed to drag out for a long time. I am not sure whether it is still a runner in a period in which fuel prices are considerably lower, but it would certainly be a great opportunity to produce heat and energy from that source in a way that a company could benefit while getting rid of a waste product at the same time.

I welcome the fact that we have the motion before us. I am not sure that the problem is as great as it was in the past. I do not believe that that is the case. It has not been entirely resolved, and it is still a work in progress. We need to get to a situation in which used tyres are disposed of entirely in a legal manner and in a way in which they are either used for recycling or for producing energy.

Mr Beggs: I, too, support the motion, which highlights the toxic nature of compounds given off as a result of burning tyres in an uncontrolled fashion. I also have some sympathy for the amendment. It is important that we do not create gaps between legislation in Northern Ireland and the Republic from which criminals could profit.

The most succinct and informed document that I have come across on the dangers from pollutants as a result of burning tyres is the chemical hazards and poisons report of December 2003 produced by the Public Health Agency in England and Wales. We are talking about poisons being given off. It lists the atmospheric pollutants and other pollutants to water and land that cause contamination. It makes for very interesting reading about some of the compounds in the atmosphere. The thick black smoke contains many hazardous chemicals, such as carbon monoxide and hydrogen cyanide, as a result of incomplete combustions. Then, of course, there are the dioxins and furans, which can cause cancer. There are also polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) due to the combustion of benzene and chlorine, both well-known hazardous substances, in the tyres. There is then the particulate material itself — the soot — which can blacken houses, land on cars, blacken areas of concrete and disrupt neighbours where such fires occur. There is also contamination to water and land. During combustion, heavy metals, phenolic compounds and PAHs leach from tyres. A significant amount of oil, as others mentioned, is liberated from each tyre during combustion. Those contaminants may leach into the ground or be washed into nearby watercourses by the firefighting exercises that ensue.

There is a well-known problem of stockpiling tyres throughout the developed world, and there have been many instances of sizeable fires in Canada and the USA. On our shores, in England in the 1970s, some 9,000 tyres were burnt in Rochdale. The water supply reservoir was closed and remains closed. Arson was suspected. In Selby, over 1,000 tyres were burnt. Twenty-one gallons of an oily leachate were removed from the site, and drinking water intake was closed for two days as a precaution. Again, arson was suspected.

In Powys in Wales in 1989 some 10 million tyres were burnt, and arson was suspected. In Cheshire, England in 1999, it was half a million tyres. Oil ran off the site and contaminated areas. Again, arson was suspected. As I mentioned, we, too, had sizeable fires in Pennyburn and Campsie, where, in one case, it was suspected that over half a million tyres were burnt and an individual profited as a result. He did not have to pay for any more recycling but will have received, at least in those days, probably about £1 per tyre going into that site. Of course, public services also had to spend some £800,000 as part of the clean-up. When we do not take action, we have to accept that costs will follow that cannot be avoided. It is worthwhile making some investment to deal with it.

Some Members mentioned the problem of fly-tipping, which is simply dumping tyres in the countryside. Then there are the bonfires that local communities can suffer from, where fires are excessive and cause difficulties. Clearly, we need to take greater care and avoid that. How we manage tyres is not sufficient, and it is clear we need to do better. There is a discrepancy in the number of tyres actually being collected and recycled. I noticed that, in the all-Ireland survey, which is highly questionable, given some of the poor responses it received — I think 2% of retailers in the Republic responded — some 1.8 million tyres were collected in Northern Ireland but 1.6 million were recycled. What happened to the other 200,000? That really does beg an answer.

We need spot checks. It is a simple process of asking, "How many tyres did you buy?" My understanding is that most people, when they buy a tyre, allow the garage to take the old one away.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Would the Member bring his remarks to a close?

Mr Beggs: It is important we do spot checks, manage the system, avoid creating unnecessary bureaucracy and do so in an efficient manner. Let us get to the bottom of this so that honest businessmen can continue to trade and those who profit from criminality can be held to account.

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

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): First, I thank Mr McMullan and his colleagues for tabling this private Members' motion on the very important subject of the regulation of waste tyres and the environmental and harmful effects of their disposal to landfill and public burning. I will also address the need to ensure that this is an issue not only for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland but the wider United Kingdom.

I want to be clear from the outset that my approach for the management of all waste streams, including waste tyres,

is to apply the waste hierarchy. Where possible, through our waste strategy and the regulations, we must prevent the production of waste in the first place. We must prepare waste streams for reuse, recycling and recovery, with disposal to landfill last of all. To help to deliver that aim, my Department's current tyre action plan includes legislative considerations, as well as regulatory and communication measures. In addition, alternative uses for waste tyres are being examined.

Current regulation for waste tyres is delivered through the implementation of duty of care legislation. Its requirements provide a basis for ensuring that movements of controlled wastes, which, in this case, are tyres, are properly identified, transported and otherwise handled in ways that are consistent with environmentally sound practices for the management of these wastes. To meet the needs of duty of care for waste tyres, NIEA audits the disposal of waste tyres at tyre-retailing facilities to ensure they are properly handled and disposed of by a licensed waste operator. As an example of that, NIEA has carried out over 90 inspections of tyre retailers, with 21 enforcement notices issued for waste offences this year. I want to be clear about this: where the evidence exists, NIEA will take enforcement action against any illegal storage or handling of waste tyres. I am fully aware that a typical car tyre costs around £2.00 to dispose of legally and that, therefore, there is a huge saving to be made in illegally dumping them.

The Republic of Ireland has been engaged in developing proposals for a full producer responsibility scheme for used tyres in the Republic of Ireland for a number of years and has set up a tyres working group involving all major stakeholders to take proposals forward.

The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment is in the lead, and my officials attend the working group meetings, which take place about every three months.

If such a scheme were to be implemented in Northern Ireland, it may follow that approach. All producers of tyres would be required to register and provide evidence of the number of tyres placed on the market. Used tyres would be left at designated collection facilities, typically retailers and garages, but they may also include council civic amenity sites. The used tyres would be collected by registered waste carriers under contract to the scheme and would deliver them to approved reprocessors. The flow of used tyres to reprocessing would be monitored by the scheme, which would report regularly to the NIEA.

All operators in the management of used tyres required to register with the scheme would be required to pay a registration fee. Customers buying new tyres would be required to pay the retailer a levy — a visible fee — set by Government. The retailer would be required to pass that fee to the scheme for every tyre sold. The scheme would establish contracts with waste tyre collectors and pay the fee to the registered collectors when they delivered the tyres to an approved reprocessor.

The introduction of a scheme would have significant legislative and resource implications. I understand that, although the Irish Government are keen to press ahead with the introduction of such a scheme in the Republic of Ireland, the necessary legislation has been delayed on a number of occasions, in part due to substantial opposition from the Irish used tyre industry. Minister Kelly announced

the introduction of the scheme in 2015. Originally, the legislation was scheduled for the summer of 2015. It is now scheduled for January 2017, but, at this stage, there is no guarantee that the proposals will proceed.

My preference would be to consider proposals for the introduction of a producer responsibility scheme in a UK-wide context. Critical to the success of any scheme will be the identification of producers, which will mainly be importers of new tyres into Northern Ireland. If Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK with such a scheme, it will be difficult to obtain accurate information on tyres coming into Northern Ireland from England or Scotland, which is the normal route. I also anticipate that there may be opposition to the introduction of such a scheme from sections of the tyre industry here, and that is likely to be exacerbated if they can argue that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom with such a scheme. The key to all this will be in ensuring that appropriate and effective enforcement action is taken against operators seeking to bypass the regime or to operate the scheme fraudulently.

It is essential that we continue to assist in providing advice and guidance to the key sectors involved in the management of used and waste tyres. We have communicated, for example, with key sectors through the development of guidance documents. These include a regulatory position statement, 'Used Tyres: The Risks and Your Responsibilities', for those dealing and handling part-worn and waste tyres, and specific guidance for farmers on the use of used tyres on farms.

A number of Members referred to alternative uses for waste tyres. My Department has been working to encourage and support commercial ideas for the reuse and recycling of waste tyres. One example that my colleague Edwin Poots referred to has been through a partnership agreement with the Lafarge cement company. The NIEA is continuing to explore opportunities to reuse waste tyres as an alternative fuel for the company's cement kilns. Lafarge has been seeking funding from its parent company to allow equipment to be bought that will automate the process, but, as yet, that is not forthcoming. We are also looking to support innovation by three other companies seeking to commercialise new ideas for the reuse and recycling of waste tyres. That will help to prevent substantial amounts of waste tyres from being dumped or used illegally.

I am fully aware that burning tyres is harmful to the environment and to human health. My Department has found that high levels of particulate pollution are frequently detected at local air pollution monitoring sites during bonfire events. Waste tyres are extremely combustible and produce thick clouds of sulphurous black smoke that contains up to 50 toxic chemicals and gases. Smoke and chemical damage can persist over a number of days as bonfires are left to smoulder.

4.30 pm

I want to put today's debate in context. A used-tyre survey, published in 2012, indicated that there are around 1.8 million used tyres in Northern Ireland each year, and only a very small percentage of them end up on bonfires. As Members will be aware, the regulation of bonfires is a complex social and cultural issue. Legally, the ultimate responsibility for a bonfire rests with the landowner, often

a public body, although those engaged in associated activities also carry certain responsibilities. While district councils often take the lead responsibility for the overall management of bonfires, a number of bodies have enforcement powers, including the PSNI, the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service, the NIEA and, of course, district councils. My Department will play its part in helping to manage this complex issue.

It is pleasing to note that our work on the control of waste tyres is having an impact. Recent evidence from Belfast City Council indicates that the number of significant bonfires reduced this summer, from over 100 to around 80; there has been an increased uptake of celebrations marked with beacons rather than bonfires; and the number of bonfires containing tyres has reduced. Indeed, on several occasions this year, under council-led initiatives and with community support, NIEA has removed over 1,000 tyres from bonfires, and progress has been made in improving their management and design. My Department will, of course, continue to support the councils in this work.

Mr McGlone raised issues in relation to the disposal of tyres to landfill. My Department has found no evidence that tyre residues sent to landfill pose a danger to the environment. All of the leachate in a permitted landfill is collected and treated. Normally, after initial treatment at the landfill, the leachate is tankered away to a waste water treatment works for further treatment. The treated discharges from waste water treatment works are closely monitored to ensure compliance with their authorisation. Similarly, landfill gas is collected and treated using gas engines to produce energy, and the emissions are monitored to ensure that they comply with the limits in the landfill permit.

Mr McKee asked for an update on the fly-tipping protocol. NIEA has been working closely with councils on a fly-tipping pilot project over the last three years. A report on the pilot is due in the next few months. Whilst a detailed approach is still to be agreed, my Department has spent approximately £300,000 each year over the last three years on resolving fly-tipping incidents throughout Northern Ireland.

Mr McMullan: Will the Minister give way?

Miss McIlveen: Yes.

Mr McMullan: Minister, we have moved away from the NIEA, the licensing authority for waste tyres. It does not have accurate records. If we were to introduce a producer liability scheme, which you are talking about, it still would not deal with the fact that the statistics that you have given us, which I am not saying are wrong, do not deal with the more than 80% of tyres that go missing every year and end up everywhere. We need this register, and we need the NIEA to update its records.

Miss McIlveen: I accept the point that Mr McMullan makes, but I am trying to put this into context and will not deviate from that.

Mr McKee made a comment about coastal management. Obviously, the creation or improvement of a sea defence requires planning permission and/or a marine construction licence. It also needs to be noted that annex II of the OSPAR convention specifically prohibits the disposal of waste in the marine environment. Tyres that have reached the end of their useful life are classified as waste.

Therefore, the use of waste tyres to protect against coastal erosion cannot be considered as a licensable activity on the coast.

In closing, I thank all Members for their contribution to the debate. I will continue to ensure that we implement fully the waste hierarchy in respect of waste tyres. It is clear that we need to support commercial opportunities for their reuse and recycling, and I have given examples of where my officials are working with companies to try to achieve this.

In relation to setting up a register for used tyres, my officials are closely monitoring developments in the Republic of Ireland and their proposals for the producer responsibility scheme for used tyres. Officials have also discussed the potential for such an approach with colleagues in England, Wales and Scotland. It would be prudent to await the outcome of developments in the Republic of Ireland and to obtain more certainty about the position of the Scottish Government before considering, in detail, the feasibility and desirability of introducing a similar scheme here.

Mr Ford: Will the Minister give way?

Miss McIlveen: I am running out of time, sorry.

Due to the nature of the tyres market across these islands, perhaps the best outcome would be to consider the introduction of this sort of scheme across the entire British Isles.

Mr Durkan: I welcome the opportunity to give a winding-up speech in what has been a healthy and positive debate. From today's contributions, it is clear that there is political unanimity that used tyres are a major problem and that there is a need for the appropriate Department and statutory agencies to get a grip on the problem and remove the environmental risk and the economic cost of used tyres. Therefore, we welcome the motion that has been brought to the House. We have proposed an amendment, which I think the Minister has now confirmed was correct, as we feel that to successfully tackle the issue, we cannot do so in isolation. We are all aware that the environment does not recognise artificial borders and neither do environmental criminals. We should not let them hamper us or restrict our attempts to ensure greater environmental protection.

I think it is fair to say that considerable work has been done on the issue — the Minister outlined some of it — by the Environment Committee in the last mandate and by past Environment Ministers. Last year, when I was Minister, I launched a used tyre action plan informed by and, importantly, in liaison with the Environment Committee. From listening to Members today, it is clear that we are not where we would like to be on the issue, but we are moving in the right direction.

It is worth pointing out that a lot of the problems mentioned during today's debate are not exclusive to Northern Ireland — maybe with the notable exception of bonfires — and nor are the difficulties in eradicating the problems that we have discussed exclusive to us in the North. The amendment calls for collaboration with the Department in the South as there has already been a partial producer responsibility scheme for tyres in place there. The review of that scheme, maybe two years ago, recommended a full producer responsibility scheme, and Mr McGlone mentioned that.

The Minister outlined how there has been huge resistance, unsurprisingly, from some in the very lucrative used tyre industry. It is fair to say that we can expect similar resistance here, but that should not deter us in any way from proceeding with positive initiatives that are for the greater good. Mr McMullan mentioned the carrier bag levy during his contribution.

I will address some of the points that contributors made today. Mr McMullan cited something that the former Environment Minister had done in 2015 and then said that nothing had been done since 2013. A few Members referred to Lafarge: in 2015, the prosperity agreement was finally, Mr Poots, signed between the NIEA and Lafarge Tarmac, which allowed the company to use tyres as a waste-derived fuel, burning tyres in their kilns instead of coal and, in doing so, reducing their carbon emissions by 10%. That is a good example of the reuse or recycling of waste tyres. New ideas like that will help to prevent substantial numbers of waste tyres being dumped or used illegally. Other uses have been touched on today, including surfacing in playgrounds, safety measures at level crossings and, as Mr McKee and Ms Archibald suggested, sea defences. The Minister pointed out that that cannot be done, although, in the case of compressed bales of waste tyres, it might be permissible. Maybe we could discuss it in the future; I know that she is very interested in coastal erosion.

A few Members mentioned bonfires. It is important that the work continues with councils and communities to eradicate tyre-burning on bonfires at any time of the year. The point that Mr Poots and Mr Beggs made about commercial crime around used tyres is something that really needs to be clamped down on.

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Durkan: Certainly.

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

Mr Beggs: You will hopefully get an extra minute for this, as well. Do you agree that it is important to remove the financial benefits for those who sometimes supply tyres to local bonfires for profit at the expense of local communities?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member will have an extra minute.

Mr Durkan: The cost of these crimes to the public purse and to the planet is staggering, and the penalties associated with these crimes really ought to reflect that.

Mr Anderson spoke of the need for a collaborative approach. We certainly concur with that, and any producer responsibility scheme and/or used tyre register will need input and will expect and demand output from a range of agencies. In our opinion, that can only be truly successful if implemented on an all-island basis, and I ask Members to support the amendment.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Before I call Linda Dillon to wind on the motion, I remind the House that loud conversations should not be taking place. Members need to be heard.

Ms Dillon: We have heard from all contributors about the harmful effects of the pollution, criminality and antisocial behaviour that derive from used tyres. Bonfires are only

one element of that antisocial behaviour, so we should not concentrate on it too much. As Mr Beggs said, there are people who drop tyres off at bonfires and encourage the use of tyres that maybe would not ordinarily have been sought by those who are lighting the bonfires in the first place.

We have heard about the cost to farmers of a permit when they find a use for used tyres, and the Minister should review this charge with a view to abolishing it. I welcome and support the amendment proposed by the SDLP. However, it is unfortunate, given that the issue has come up in the Chamber before, that the previous Minister was not able to move forward with the Committee report, as one of its recommendations was that any scheme should be developed in close liaison with the Twenty-six Counties.

A number of people mentioned councils being the first port of call and having the first responsibility for tyres, particularly tyres on bonfires. We probably need to be a wee bit cautious about that. As one who comes from one of the 11 new councils, I know that we often leave issues to councils to deal with, but we need to make legislation and rules in central government that mean councils are able to do what they need to do without incurring additional cost. If there is additional cost, we need to look at helping them with it.

The fact that we are discussing the issue in the Assembly again indicates the failure to properly address it, and I call on the new Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to act on the motion and be the Minister who implements real and effective action on the issue rather than paying lip service to it.

I welcome the support for the motion and the amendment from across the Chamber, and I genuinely hope that we will see plans come to the Committee as soon as possible. As has already been said by some Members, we cannot take the fact that there will be some opposition to this as a reason not to act on it. There is opposition from some quarter to every piece of legislation that we bring to the Chamber, but that does not mean that we cannot move things forward. I call on the Minister to act on the motion and finally get something done about used tyres so that we do not need to bring the issue back to the Chamber again.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 42; Noes 49.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Hanna and Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley,

Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr Robinson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the dangerous emission of toxic fumes and gases into the atmosphere from the public burning of used car tyres; notes that the residue is sent to landfill and still poses an environmental danger; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to establish a used-tyre register to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.

Adjourned at 5.01 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 September 2016

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Public Petition: End the Veto on Marriage Equality

Mr Speaker: Mr Gerry Carroll 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 matter.

Mr Carroll: I am absolutely proud to present this petition to the Assembly on behalf of the 20,000 people who signed The Gay Say's online petition. The petition was a response to the DUP's move to veto marriage equality in November 2015, which was deeply upsetting for the thousands of people here whose rights are being denied. The signatures represent the feeling of the vast majority of people across society here that the DUP should end its veto on marriage equality, allow democracy to take its course and allow the Assembly to legislate for same-sex marriage.

While presenting the petition, I say this to the DUP: you are on the wrong side of history; you are on the wrong side of the fight for equality. History will not be kind to those who block progress and human rights. History will not be kind to those who block equality and deny rights to our LGBT brothers and sisters.

The petition is a small but significant token of the groundswell of support amongst ordinary people for equality in our society. I say to those people: do not lose hope, keep marching, keep protesting and keep up the fight. What Stormont does, the people can undo. If we keep doing what we are doing, the sun will one day set on the deniers of equality, and the rainbow will rise.

Mr Carroll moved forward and laid the petition on the Table.

Mr Speaker: I will send a copy of the petition to the Minister and to the Committee.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Inland Waterways

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): With your permission, a Cheann Comhairle, and in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I want to make a statement about the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) inland waterways sectoral meeting, which was held in the North/South Ministerial Council's joint secretariat headquarters in Armagh on 24 June 2016.

The Irish Government were represented by Seán Kyne TD, Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources. The Executive were represented by Paul Givan, Minister for Communities, and me as Minister for Infrastructure. After chairing the meeting, I agreed this statement with Minister Givan, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

At the meeting we dealt with inland waterways issues, mainly those that relate to Waterways Ireland. As it was the first inland waterways sectoral meeting for Minister Givan and me, the chief executive of Waterways Ireland, Dawn Livingstone, provided an overview of the operation of the organisation and a forward view, focusing on high-level issues.

She then provided a progress report, which included the following highlights. Over 90% of the waterways were open for navigation from April to May. Recreational amenities on the waterways continue to be developed, including the development and marketing of blueways. The Shannon-Erne blueway, which runs from Leitrim village to Belturbet, was launched in May 2016 and comprises 70 kilometres of water trail and over 17 kilometres of walking and cycling routes.

Work with the relevant stakeholders has started on plans to develop a greenway along the route of the Ulster canal from Castle Saunderson in County Cavan to Charlemont in County Armagh. Support has been offered to 121 events under the 2016 sponsorship programme, 19 community groups have been awarded funding under the Waterways Ireland heritage in the community grants programme and three new businesses have been developed; namely, Erne Boat Hire, a new water taxi on the Erne and a new hire cruise provider on the Shannon.

We were also updated on Waterways Ireland's work to maximise the benefit of EU funding opportunities, which included examining with our partners the potential for funding under INTERREG Va, the rural development

LEADER cooperation measure, the INTERREG Atlantic area transnational programme and ERASMUS+.

We were also informed that the Waterways Ireland annual report and draft accounts 2015 have been submitted to the Comptrollers and Auditors General. Following certification, the annual report and accounts will be laid before the Assembly and both Houses of the Oireachtas.

Ministers considered and consented to a number of property disposals proposed by Waterways Ireland. We agreed that the next sectoral meeting for Inland Waterways would be in autumn 2016.

Mrs Palmer: I thank the Minister for his statement. I am particularly interested in his comment that recreational amenities on the waterways continue to be developed. If that is the case, will he support the application by the Lagan Canal Trust to complete the full business case for the opening of the canal and the River Lagan from Lisburn to Belfast, as it is essential to the links with the Ulster canal and the Shannon?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question and her interest in what may be a very viable and important project to develop in the future. It is, of course, not related to the North/South Ministerial Council sectoral meeting that I took part in. If the Member wishes to correspond with me on the issue, however, I am more than happy to look at it.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. As someone who uses the Lagan canal walkway and towpath, I ask what progress was made on funding mechanisms for the development of greenways along the Ulster canal.

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. It is in an issue that has been in the media over the past few weeks. I am glad to report that there seems to be a lot of progress being made on that. Restoration works on the section of the Ulster canal from Lough Erne to Castle Saunderson are making good progress and should be completed by next year. There are further sections from County Monaghan and County Cavan and into Armagh, and, of course, there is great potential for greenway expansion.

Waterways Ireland and the relevant stakeholders have submitted an application for €6 million under INTERREG Va. The application has gone through to stage 2, and a more detailed submission has been made. I am aware of a press release made by Minister Humphreys in the past few days regarding the application, and I hope to be in a similar position to confirm the successful outcome in the very near future.

Mr Lynch: I thank the Minister for his statement. I think he will be visiting Waterways Ireland soon and will be welcomed to the county. Will he outline the main priorities of Waterways Ireland in 2017?

Mr Hazzard: I will indeed be visiting Waterways Ireland on Friday. I am very much looking forward to spending some time in Fermanagh and looking at the potential of Waterways Ireland and at some of the great things it has been doing.

Waterways Ireland has set the following key priorities in its 2017 business plan: implement a prioritised management and maintenance programme for the waterways, focusing on the areas and times of greatest use; deliver a prioritised programme of infrastructural repairs focused on structures considered to be in critical condition; build and

support partnerships on each of the waterways with local communities, waterways user groups and various tourism and recreational bodies; develop projects that will increase the recreational use of canals for walking and cycling in partnership with key stakeholders; and invest in key waterway locations that have rich recreational environment and heritage assets, prioritising future developments on achieving sustainable economic and social benefits in partnership with key stakeholders.

Mr McNulty: I thank the Minister for his statement. The Newry canal is of obvious historical significance to our region of Newry and Armagh and has the potential to link Coleraine to Carlingford lough. What has been done to exploit the commercial and tourism potential of our eastern seaboard canals? Will the Minister outline whether he has discussed this development and provide a time frame of when he expects the work to be completed?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. Again, this is not an issue that has any relevance to the meeting and the statement. However, given my knowledge of the local area, I know that work is ongoing to scope out the potential to develop blueways in the lower Bann. In the North, it is quite difficult to develop blueway and greenway infrastructure on Lough Erne and on the lower Bann given the dynamics and nature of the two river courses. There is great potential to develop the Newry canal to link Carlingford lough to Lough Neagh, as you mentioned. My Department continues to look at that, and I am aware that one of the INTERREG applications is for that particular area.

Mr Speaker: Before I call the next Member to speak, I remind Members that we are asking questions to the Minister on the statement he has made to the House this morning.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you very much for your statement, Minister. I will go directly to your statement. You said that you are examining possible funding with partners. What guarantee have the UK Government given that, if any of this funding is secured, they will continue to fund it post-Brexit?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for her question. This is a very relevant issue. The Chancellor has made it clear that INTERREG applications that are in before the autumn statement will be underwritten. Given the transnational nature of a lot of these applications, we await to see concrete confirmation. It is something that we are continuing to work on. If the news coming from the SEUPB on these applications is positive, we need to do all we can, and I pledge to do all I can, to ensure that money is protected for the Ulster canal, the Newry canal and the development of greenways in the Derry area.

Mr Easton: Thank you for your statement, Minister. You mentioned the disposal of properties by Waterways Ireland. What are these properties and assets?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. We covered a number of properties. I do not have the list of properties with me here this morning, but I am more than happy to correspond with the Member on that.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for his statement. As a member of the Infrastructure Committee, I am also, along with others, looking forward to visiting Waterways Ireland in the near future. Is it possible for the Minister to outline

some of the capital works that have been undertaken in recent years in the North and those that are planned?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. Approximately £0.5 million was spent on capital works in the previous year, including £85,000 on urgent repairs as a result of the severe winter flooding.

Routine capital works carried out in 2015-16 included the installation of replacement lock gates and repairs to the lock chamber at Toome in County Antrim. Buoy mooring, which is a new product on Lough Erne, was developed and installed by the Erne operations team, and there were works to replace the moorings and enhance the slipway at Carrybridge.

I also made available £1 million to Waterways Ireland in June for spend in the North. That will be spent on the removal and replacement of public moorings; dredging at Kesh on Lough Erne and the removal and replacement of the moorings; and the lock chamber repair and lock gate replacement on the lower Bann.

10.45 am

Mr Robinson: I thank the Minister for his statement. Can he provide information on the 19 community groups funded under the heritage in the community grants programme? How many of the groups are based in Northern Ireland? What have the groups been funded to do?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. I do not have the information on how many of the groups are based in the North, but these local community groups will certainly be taking part in a wide range of activities based in and around the waterways. I am aware of one group that used funding to develop a brochure on the heritage assets in the local area. This is very important for developing tourism, both for those coming to the island and for local tourism. Developing a broad range of heritage activities and interests for the local population is central to a lot of the community grants.

Mr McCartney: I thank the Minister for his statement. In an earlier response to Seán Lynch, he talked about the priorities for 2017: given the recent announcements of a number of greenways in the north-west, should one of the priorities going forward be trying to link greenways to waterways to ensure that we have a sort of connectivity?

Mr Hazzard: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, the Member is correct: some people will view our canal systems as sleeping relics from the past, but they are great assets if they are harnessed well. We can do an awful lot, not just for the tourists who come to our island and avail themselves of the growing active tourism market but for local people who are very interested in an active life and practices. We see this. Derry is a great example: I believe that we have more active greenway in Derry than in other cities such as Paris. Derry is very much leading the way, and I will shortly publicise a strategy for greenways going forward. That will very much be at the centre of my programme of work.

North/South Ministerial Council: Language Body

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I am glad that I got here in time. I was in your constituency, Mr Speaker, at Ashfield. Proceedings were efficiently taken forward by you. I got here in time.

With your permission and in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make a statement on the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) language body meeting that was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on 24 June 2016. The Executive were represented by me, as Minister for Communities, and by Assembly Member Chris Hazzard, Minister for Infrastructure. The Irish Government were represented by Seán Kyne TD, Minister of State for Gaeltacht Affairs and Natural Resources. The statement has been agreed with Minister Hazzard, and I make it on behalf of us both. The meeting dealt with issues relating to the language body and its two constituent agencies, and the following topics were discussed and, where appropriate, decisions taken.

As part of their opening remarks, Ministers acknowledged the work of the late Joe McDonagh, former chief executive and chairman of Foras na Gaeilge, who, sadly, passed away on 20 May 2016, and expressed their condolences to his family and colleagues.

Following the opening remarks by Ministers, the chief executive officers provided a high-level overview of the operational activities of the agencies of the North/South Language Body. Ministers noted progress reports from the chairperson of the Ulster-Scots Agency and the chief executive officers of the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge, which included the following achievements relating to the period from November 2015 to June 2016.

In respect of the Ulster-Scots Agency, there was a Burns Night concert in the Ulster Hall in January 2016, headlined by leading Scots traditional musicians, the Ulster Orchestra and a host of local talent. There was a primary school World War I drama project that involved 32 primary schools attending performances of Philip Orr's play, 'Wae a Hairt an a Hauf' — I am sure that that is wrong. If only we had Jim Shannon, who could speak fluent Ulster Scots when he was here and we all knew what he was saying. They performed at Fort Dunree in County Donegal, Cavan County Museum, the Somme Heritage Centre in County Down and Mossley Mill in County Antrim. Over 1,400 pupils were involved in the project. The inaugural Ulster-Scots science week took place between 23 May and 27 May 2016, with pupils from five primary schools participating in science workshops based around the Ulster-Scots innovators Harry Ferguson, Frank Pantridge and Lord Kelvin, and the Bruce medieval festival was held over the weekend of the 4 and 5 June 2016 and attracted more than 3,000 visitors to Carrickfergus.

With respect to Foras na Gaeilge, the online version of the new English-Irish dictionary is now 100% complete, with 130,000 sense units, and the number of people using Foras na Gaeilge's dictionary and terminology sites continues to grow. A portal website for the Irish language and Foras na Gaeilge's new corporate website have been developed and were launched on 29 June. Grants to the value of €158,000 were approved for 69 summer camps that will facilitate in excess of 3,000 children. Foras na Gaeilge has been awarded the National Standards

Authority of Ireland's SWiFT 3000 award for the second time and the gold standard. Both awards acknowledge excellence in corporate governance. Foras na Gaeilge also presented the results of the all-island survey on attitudes to the Irish language.

Progress on collaboration between the Ulster-Scots Agency and Foras na Gaeilge was also reported. It included the fact that both agencies are examining the possibility of taking part in the United Youth programme, as laid out in OFMDFM's Together: Building a United Community strategy, to provide an outlet for 10,000 young people who are not in training, education or employment. The two agencies are engaged in year 3 of a programme designed to inform pupils and raise their awareness of Irish language and linguistic heritage and Ulster-Scots heritage, culture and language. The feasibility of publishing a trilingual version of Philip Robinson's book on the flora and fauna of Northern Ireland is being explored, and consideration is being given to developing a poetry/singing project for primary-school children that will include the works of Robbie Burns and others.

The NSMC noted that previous sponsors and Finance Ministers had approved the business plans and budgets for Foras na Gaeilge and the Ulster-Scots Agency, which included the agreed efficiency savings to the 2016 budgets in accordance with the guidance issued by both Finance Departments. The Council approved the 2016 business plans, with budgets of €14,782,000 for Foras na Gaeilge and €3,347,000 for the Ulster-Scots Agency.

Ministers approved the appointments of Ms Rosie Ní Laoghaire and Mr Conor McGuinness to the board of the North/South Language Body until 12 December and agreed that existing board member Mr Marcas Mac Ruairi should be vice-chair of the North/South Language Body until his term of appointment ends on 12 December.

The Council noted that both agencies continue to engage in the identification of possible opportunities to maximise the benefits of EU funding. The Ulster-Scots Agency is in discussions with Monaghan County Council about participating in a bid to secure Peace programme resources to develop a peace campus at a site in Monaghan town. It is working with a range of partners to establish a network, which has a working title of 'Les Langues Mal Aimées', which is 'The Badly Loved Languages' — maybe that is apt, given how I am pronouncing it.

That will involve participation by a number of French minority language interests, and also by the Upper Silesian minority in Poland. Opportunities are also being progressed under the European Route of Industrial Heritage network (ERIH), which has over 200 members in 43 countries. It was established with funds from the EU culture programme and focuses on the promotion of industrial heritage. Finally, the agency is monitoring the progress of the development of the LEADER rural development programme for opportunities for Ulster Scots.

Foras na Gaeilge is implementing the literary project Other Words under the Creative Europe programme. This is a four-year programme to promote writing in minority languages. Foras na Gaeilge is also considering a number of possible projects. The first relates to the Slí Cholmcille/St Columba heritage trail. This is a joint application between Derry City and Strabane District

Council — the lead partner — Foras na Gaeilge, Argyll and Bute Council and other European partners under the EU's Atlantic area programme for a project entitled European Connected Cultural Caminos. At the same time, Foras na Gaeilge is working on a potential consortium bid under Horizon 2020 for a language-planning research project, involving partners in Scotland, Norway and Finland. Finally, the lead organisations EU funding working group is exploring funding opportunities for partnership projects. Collaboration between agencies and officials in both jurisdictions continues to maximise drawdown of EU funding and seek new opportunities for potential projects that can attract such EU funding.

The Council noted that the 2014 consolidated North/South Language Body annual report and accounts were laid in the Houses of the Oireachtas and in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 23 June 2016, and that the field audits for the 2015 accounts have commenced in both agencies.

Ministers noted the process for the recruitment of the chief executive officer for Foras na Gaeilge, subject to already established finance and NSMC procedures. Ministers approved the interim arrangements that would be put in place to manage the business of the agency in the event that a suitable candidate was not in post before 19 September.

Ministers noted that both Finance and sponsor Departments had already approved the InterTradelreland business plan and budget grant. The Council approved InterTradelreland's business plan for 2016 and the budget grant provision for 2016 at £2,426,160, with £41,000 to be drawn from Northern Ireland funding relating to 2015 accrued expenditure.

The NSMC approved the continuation of the framework designed to support the Loughs Agency in dealing with emergencies, such as a serious pollution incident, for a further period of one year, with effect from 20 July 2016. Ministers agreed to review the operation of this procedure, including its possible renewal, based on a report from the Loughs Agency and the sponsor Departments, before 20 July 2017.

The Council agreed to meet again in language body sectoral format in autumn 2016.

Mr Allen: I place on record my apologies to the Minister for missing his opening remarks. I thank the Minister for his statement. In particular, I welcome the reference to the inaugural Ulster-Scots science week. I urge the Minister to give this type of venture his full support, so that more children can learn the stories of positive role models such as Harry Ferguson, Frank Pantridge and Lord Kelvin, who came from Northern Ireland and gained world renown and recognition as innovators.

Mr Givan: I can assure the Member, especially given that Harry Ferguson was a native of Lagan Valley, residing in south Dromore. Frank Pantridge, who invented the defibrillator, was also a native of my constituency. I am particularly keen to promote their work. Indeed, the Council plans to have a specific celebration of Frank Pantridge in the not too distant future. They are examples of Ulster-Scots people who were fantastic inventors, despite, at times, the opposition they faced when taking forward some of their projects. If you look into Harry Ferguson's history, you see that he was quite a character. He was determined, as many Ulster-Scots people are, to see the end result of his work. They have left a legacy

in agriculture and in the fact that many people owe their lives to the invention of Frank Pantridge. They are people whom we can be proud of. I am sure that the Ulster Scots will continue to take forward events, and I will be happy to support them.

11.00 am

Ms Lockhart: Will the Minister outline to the House any similar or equivalent initiatives to that of Líofo?

Mr Givan: The Líofo programme was taken forward by a previous Minister. Its targets, as I understand, have almost been met. The Ulster-Scots Agency wants to take forward a similar scheme, where you would have taster events and people would be able to come to understand their history, the culture and, of course, the language. Obviously, resource is involved in that, but I believe very much that we have a rich cultural heritage that people should be encouraged to explore. I hope that the Ulster-Scots Agency will take forward a programme that it wishes to get some support for.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Minister for his statement. I know from my experience that, at times, issues come up, such as the last question, that are not covered in the statement. Perhaps, at the next NSMC sectoral meeting for languages, the Minister could get an update from Foras na Gaeilge on its arrangements for the groups that get smaller bits of funding under scéim phobail Gaeilge (SPG). There is growing concern that Foras, as a parent body, is not giving the support and finances needed for those groups to grow right across the country.

Mr Givan: I am happy to look into the issue that the Member has raised in respect of how smaller organisations are being supported. In any environment, a lot of the larger organisations often attract the significant levels of funding, but it is important that, where there is grass-roots engagement and organisations on a smaller scale are involved, they also are being supported. I am happy to raise the issue with Foras na Gaeilge.

Ms Mallon: It seems from the statement that Foras na Gaeilge has had its budget cut by 21% since 2014, compared with the 5-4% cut for the Ulster-Scots Agency. Will the Minister provide some insight into that disparity?

Mr Givan: That budget was established and signed off by previous Ministers. I point the Member to the disparity in the quantum that the Irish-language body gets compared with that of the Ulster-Scots body. It is not always the case that there is the same need and demand, so it is important that you resource according to the demand that exists. The Irish-language bodies were founded long before the Ulster-Scots Agency. Therefore, they had built up a lot of the work that they were doing, so the funding that they were receiving was significantly higher than what the Ulster-Scots Agency received when it came into being. As the Ulster-Scots Agency develops its work and seeks to have parity in demand, I anticipate that the significant resource gap that exists will start to close. Obviously, it is important to look at the demand and needs that exist rather than just funding, whether it is the Irish language or Ulster Scots, on the basis of things that are not there. We need to support projects that are valued and that have an end product. However, we live in a tightening budgetary framework. Obviously, those bodies have had to make efficiencies just like any other public-sector body has had to do, as we, as

an Executive, seek to protect front-line health services, for example.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for the statement that you have made today. There is a stark contrast in the achievements that you set out in your statement between those of the Ulster-Scots Agency, which focused on events, and Foras na Gaeilge, which facilitated linguistic development through its online dictionary and summer camps etc.

Do you agree with me that, if languages are to succeed, short-termism will not work and that linguistic development is needed?

Mr Givan: I think that, in all these things, people have different interests when it comes to their cultural heritage. For some, it is going to be the language and, for others, it is going to be the music. I think people should be given the opportunity to explore the different aspects they enjoy within their cultural heritage. That does not necessarily mean that funding should be purely dedicated towards the linguistic side; it can also mean that funding goes towards the musical and cultural aspects.

Mr Stalford: Following the success of the Belfast Tattoo recently, we saw that bands form an essential part of the Ulster-Scots tradition, whether they be fife and drum bands, flute bands or pipe bands. Can the Minister detail what, if any, additional resources the Department for Communities has allocated or intends to allocate to that sector?

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for that question. I know the Arts Council has had reductions to its budget, again because of the pressures that exist. When I came into office, I was keen to see how we could support the arts, so some additional money was found to put into the scheme to buy musical instruments. That was £200,000. I know that, at the time, some within the arts fraternity felt that was not beneficial. However, when I met the chairman and chief executive of the Arts Council, they were delighted that we were able to provide that funding. The Ulster-Scots Agency has been very active in its network. I was in Upper Bann with Carla Lockhart, who had me at one of the programmes. You were able to see how the agency was advising groups on the process that needs to be followed so that they could access that type of funding. The Ulster-Scots Agency is also involved in tuition. I am keen to see how we can provide support for musical instruments and, potentially, tuition. I want to look at the criteria that currently exist for the musical instruments fund to see what we can do on the tuition side of it. The level of participation in bands numbers thousands and thousands of people. Therefore, it is only right that they also receive support from this Government.

Mr Speaker: Again, I remind Members that we are questioning the Minister on his statement, as opposed to what might be our own particular interests in his bailiwick, if I can use the word "bailiwick" in this context.

Mr McCartney: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas seo. I thank the Minister for his statement. It was indeed a very comprehensive statement. I am sure it is not every day in the week that Ministers are expected to come here and converse in four different languages, but the Minister did that quite well this morning, may I add?

I note the progress of the Slí Cholmille project in Derry, but my question relates to the 69 summer camps. Can the

Minister give us some detail of what the summer camps entailed and whether he thinks they feed into the wider process of Together: Building a United Community, which is at the core of the Executive Office?

Mr Givan: I will come back to the Member specifically on the summer camps when I have more detail about them. That is obviously something that is being taken forward. Let me write specifically to the Member on that question.

Mr Lyons: I thank the Minister for his statement. I note the development of the English-Irish dictionary and that the online version is now complete. Does he agree with me that it would be good for him to look into the possibility of developing an Ulster-Scots dictionary? Would that have his support? Does he not agree that that would be a very useful development and something that many people in Northern Ireland would want to use?

Mr Givan: I suppose the Member does represent East Antrim, where maybe a little bit more of the Ulster-Scots language is spoken — in the north Antrim areas. Obviously, if the Ulster-Scots Agency has proposals it wants to take forward on a dictionary, I would be happy to look at them.

Mr Allister: At this meeting, the Council and the Minister approved the budget for 2016: a staggering figure of over £10 million for Foras na Gaeilge; less than a quarter of that for Ulster Scots. Does the Minister have any vision for, during his time in office, addressing this extravagance and that inbuilt disparity? If he has such a vision, how does he intend to deliver reducing this extravagance?

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for the question. It touches on a previous comment by Ms Mallon that, in her view, Foras na Gaeilge's budget has been — I am paraphrasing — savaged by 26%, whereas Ulster Scots has not faced the same reduction. These are times of challenging finances, and it is difficult. As I said to Ms Mallon, however, I am keen to make sure that where there is a need, and that is presented and justified, and where we can support that within the priorities and pressures facing my Department and the Executive as a whole, our cultural heritage does, I believe, add value.

I was talking recently to Mr Jim Samples, president of a significant film company that operates in over 100 countries. He lives in Knoxville, Tennessee and has been to the Museum of Appalachia, as have I, which is very similar to the Ulster American Folk Park. When I had a conversation with him about that cultural heritage and linkage, he was very excited about wanting to come to Northern Ireland. Where you can engage with people because of the cultural assets that we have, that opens the door for other opportunities that Northern Ireland can benefit from. As the Minister responsible for culture, I would like to encourage and support that.

Would I like a greater equality of funding between the two bodies? Yes, I would, but the Ulster-Scots Agency needs to be able to develop programmes and schemes that demonstrate the need for funding. As that need comes forward, as, I have no doubt, Foras na Gaeilge will put its needs forward, there are issues that will be considered.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his answers. Minister, these figures represent an improvement in the situation. Historically, the disparity between Ulster Scots and Irish was 8:1. However, the disparity still exists,

and you addressed that in a number of answers. May I encourage the Minister to work with the chief executive of the Ulster-Scots Agency, Ian Crozier, and his chairman, Tom Scott, to try to eradicate this disparity, which is not acceptable, and deliver, as others have failed to do, cultural equality in Northern Ireland between Ulster Scots and Irish?

Mr Givan: Those are issues that I am happy to engage on. The support that Foras na Gaeilge gets from the Irish Government is because of the extent to which the Irish language prevails in the South, and that has been part of the rationale for the justification for the budget that exists there. I am repeating myself: I would like greater parity between the two bodies, and I am sure that the Ulster-Scots Agency will want to pursue that.

Ms Gildernew: I thank the Minister for his statement and apologise for missing the start of it. May I seek an assurance from the Minister that, following on from his participation in this NSMC meeting, he has a positive agenda for the promotion of the Irish language and Ulster Scots? Also, does he share my concerns that any future withdrawal from EU membership could have a negative impact on the promotion and protection of regional and minority languages, as referred to in the European charter?

Mr Givan: We touched briefly at the meeting on EU funding issues.

Obviously, the outworkings of the United Kingdom's decision to leave Europe are not a matter for any of the North/South bodies in the format in which they are constituted, but we need to be alert to the environment that exists, which could be changing, and how we react to that. We touched on it at the meeting to make sure that we were looking at what opportunities there are now, what potential opportunities there are and what consequences there may well be.

On the Member's first point about the positive approach that I want to take, I say, "Absolutely". The Irish language and Ulster Scots add to the cultural offering that we have in Northern Ireland, and I am happy to support that. When I think of the history of the Irish language, I believe that it was very much Scottish Presbyterians who came and kept the language alive. There are roots in that language that everybody can have some sort of affinity with. Making that point, I think that it is important that Irish language culture and Ulster-Scots language culture be given an opportunity to develop. At times, the languages are not always best pushed and promoted through what is, I think, their politicisation. We all need to be mindful of that.

11.15 am

Private Members' Business

Japanese Knotweed

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

Mrs Cameron: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals for a regional programme to eradicate Japanese knotweed.

I welcome the opportunity to propose the motion, and I hope that, in highlighting the issue, we can bring forward a strategy to deal with the problem of Japanese knotweed.

By way of background, Japanese knotweed is an invasive alien plant species introduced to the United Kingdom in the 19th century as an ornamental shrub. Since its introduction, it has spread ferociously and without obstruction, particularly on waste ground and along watercourses. The plant is so well established that it is not included on the EU list of invasive species, and it is unlikely ever to be wiped out. It becomes rapidly established in tall thickets, preventing the growth of native species. In doing so, it chokes waterways and hedgerows and greatly reduces local biodiversity. The blight of invasive species is among the greatest threat to biodiversity and ecosystems globally and is viewed as a major hazard to the character of our heritage, the environment and, of course, the benefits that a diverse ecosystem provides.

The impact that it can have on the built environment is also of great concern. Japanese knotweed can penetrate concrete and tarmac and cause structural damage to buildings. That is particularly distressing for householders who have found themselves in a position in which their property becomes virtually worthless owing to the mortgage company's reluctance to lend on homes that have been affected by or are even in proximity to an infestation of Japanese knotweed.

The ability of the plant to spread is unparalleled. It can be spread from the very smallest amount of a cut stem, crown or rhizome, thus making removal and disposal incredibly difficult. Often, it can be dealt with only by specialists. The invasive species strategy for Northern Ireland estimates that Japanese knotweed costs the British economy £179 million a year, and I am sure that everyone here will agree that that is a phenomenal amount of money being spent to deal with what is essentially a biological pest and a nuisance.

Japanese knotweed is classed as an invasive species under schedule 9 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, which makes it an offence to plant or grow it. However, there is currently no legal requirement for landowners to control or remove Japanese knotweed growing on their property. With the issue being classed as a civil matter, there is little protection to stop it spreading from one area to another. Although it is an offence to allow the spread of Japanese knotweed, it can become a costly

and lengthy exercise for an individual to take a landowner to court to recover the costs of removal and disposal. The area is fraught with ambiguity, and identifying the responsibilities for containment, treatment and disposal is a massive grey area. Legislation brought forward in England in 2014 and 2015 and the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 have gone some way to addressing the spread of Japanese knotweed and have introduced the use of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBO) as a deterrent and an encouragement to deal with the problem. I believe that that approach could be looked at for Northern Ireland and that the threat of the antisocial behaviour order on a landowner may, in cases, be sufficient to ensure that action is taken to treat the problem and prevent the spread. Further powers in England have been introduced under the Infrastructure Act 2015, which allows environmental authorities to enter into species control agreements with landowners and impose species control orders as required.

Legislation in Northern Ireland provides for local councils to enforce antisocial behaviour orders and address statutory nuisances. To date, the powers have not been used to deal with Japanese knotweed, which I feel is an area that could be further explored. There is also scope for councils to intervene under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 by classifying Japanese knotweed as nuisance. Nuisance is classified as something that causes damage or unreasonable and substantial interference to a person's use or enjoyment of property. The potential for damage caused by Japanese knotweed must surely be recognised under that classification, and I urge that the Act be extended to include it and give councils greater powers of enforcement.

The need for a regional programme of eradication is evident. The recent case of Mr and Mrs Atkinson, whose north Belfast home is bordered by waste ground that is infested by Japanese knotweed, plainly highlights the need for action.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Cameron: I will indeed.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for raising Mr and Mrs Atkinson's situation. I have visited their home, and I know the Member has previously been in touch as Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment. This has caused considerable distress and anxiety to Mr and Mrs Atkinson, and I welcome the Member raising it in the House this morning.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Member for his intervention, and I understand that it has caused great distress to that family. The ground next to the Atkinson's property is in private ownership and would require them to take costly and time-consuming civil action, whilst the plant is growing at a rate of up to eight inches every day. They cannot cut it or dig it up, as that causes an acceleration in growth. The only method to try to eradicate it is an expensive course of chemical treatment that could take up to seven years to completely clear the problem.

Japanese knotweed is on the rapid increase in Northern Ireland, and we must take steps to ensure that we prevent its spread. I am pragmatic enough to understand that it may be virtually impossible to completely eradicate the problem, but it is a problem that we cannot continue to ignore. A regional programme could clearly set out a plan

to deal with the issue and how best to manage it, coupled with a more considered use of current legislation and clarification of some aspects of regulation. We can easily close the loopholes surrounding Japanese knotweed and assist councils in formulating a more strategic approach. The precedent has been set in our neighbouring jurisdictions. The legal framework is in place, and the will is there. We must work towards removing the grey areas and make the treatment of Japanese knotweed simpler, quicker and less ambiguous in order to protect our precious ecosystem and the built environment.

Ms Dillon: In my role as Chairperson of the Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (AERA) Committee, I would like to take the opportunity to mention that the Committee has identified knotweed and, indeed, hogweed as potential problems. The issue was first raised at the Committee meeting on 16 June, when it became apparent that practically every member around the table had issues with knotweed and/or hogweed. When we questioned officials, it became clear that there was no consistent or coherent strategy to deal with it; in fact, the Department told us that, despite recognising that knotweed and hogweed are species that “cause significant problems operationally”, they are dealing with it on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee was told that the EU had legislated in the area with the invasive alien species regulation, but, in the same breath, we were told that the regulation did not apply to knotweed. We were later told that other jurisdictions had tried a different approach, such as the use of ASBOs, but, to the Committee and me, that is clearly not a satisfactory position. We wrote to the Department asking for more information and were subsequently informed that the Wildlife Order 1985 made it an offence to cause to grow in the wild or release or allow to escape in the wild any non-native plant listed under schedule 9 to the legislation. Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed are listed in Part II of schedule 9, but the Department’s role is limited to the provision of advice and guidance on the management of invasive species. Again, I can state that the Committee was not satisfied with the answer, and we have now asked for further details, such as statistical information on the extent of the problem in the North, including the number of known cases, the geographical spread of the problem and the financial implications. I look forward to receiving that information in due course, and I am sure that we will be interested in its content.

I am the Sinn Féin spokesperson for agriculture, environment and rural affairs, and this issue came to Mid Ulster District Council in 2015. It could not be supported because there was nothing being put in place to protect those who may find themselves in the position of having this on their property and not being able to deal with it because they do not have the financial capacity to do so. Whatever we decide to do, we need to protect those who may not have the financial capacity to deal with the problem. However, I accept that that may be no good to those who live in neighbouring properties, whose finances are negatively impacted, their property reduced in value and their quality of life obviously impacted on as well.

It is a significant problem, and we need to find a proper strategy and a way to move forward. It is extremely important that we deal with the issue and come up with a strategy that protects all.

Mr Swann: I thank the Members for tabling the motion. This change to our business allows more than one Member to table the same motion, and this is similar to a motion that I had tabled and to a private Member’s Bill that, as I have indicated to you, Mr Speaker, I intend to bring. I thank the Members for getting the matter to the Floor a little more quickly than I was able to.

I heard the proposer and the Chair of the Committee indicate the threat that this invasive, non-native species has become. In my constituency, I am working on three cases concerning Japanese knotweed, but they do not afford the same actions as have been suggested by the proposer of the motion, the Chair of the Committee or possibly even by the Minister. The three cases are all in developments built by a private developer who brought in backfill from another site that had not been screened for either Japanese knotweed or giant hogweed, and so the two invasive species have developed around those properties. The developer has declared himself bankrupt and gone into liquidation, and the liquidator has declared non-interest in the properties because of the presence of Japanese knotweed. I think that the proposer, Ms Cameron, referred to banks refusing mortgages because of the presence of Japanese knotweed and its destructiveness. The problem then falls to the neighbours, who bought properties in the same area from the same developers a number of years back. These are significant developments, and the Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed that has become established on one property is spreading into neighbouring properties and gardens. As has been mentioned, once established, these species know no borders or boundaries, and they spread at a significant rate — eight inches per day. When I was there, it was up over my head. Once they become established, these species are a severe problem.

The research paper has been very deliberate about what can be done in different jurisdictions, but it all revolves around someone owning or having responsibility for the premises on which the Japanese knotweed is present. We do not have a mechanism with any of our legislative forms, should it be at Assembly level, at council level or through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), for a requirement for that invasive species to be eradicated because of the significant cost. I would like to see that being teased out in the Minister’s response because, as the Chair of the Committee indicated, it is a problem throughout Northern Ireland. Even her officials at the Committee that day acknowledged the presence of it on their ground. They said that they treated it on a case-by-case basis if there was a threat that it would go on to a neighbour’s premises, but only if and when there was a threat.

11.30 am

The problem with Japanese knotweed is the roots. The extensive root system can grow up to 7 metres so they have to be treated at deep-root level, and it is not a matter of just cutting them off and moving on.

Having interacted with the two councils that fall within my constituency — Causeway Coast and Glens and Mid and East Antrim — I know that they would both like the powers to do something about it, but their answer is, “It is an Assembly problem. We do not have the legislation to tackle it, but if we had we would”. I ask the Minister to take an additional look at what can be done when it is present

on premises that do not have an owner. When premises become vacant and the receiver declares non-interest, they move to the Crown as bona vacantia. The Crown now has responsibility for the premises causing the problems in my constituency.

I know that some of the Minister's colleagues have taken on Crown responsibilities, so I ask the Minister to look at what can be done with Japanese knotweed, especially when it is now prevalent in areas where it causes a real problem to neighbouring landowners.

Ms S Bradley: I also thank the Members who tabled the motion. As you are aware, Japanese knotweed is a problem that is peppered throughout Northern Ireland, but we do not really have a handle on where it is most prevalent and where it causes most problems. However, as a Member for South Down, I can confirm that the problem exists in the constituency. Thankfully, it is on a smaller scale than in other constituencies, but, nonetheless, there is a worry that it will spread, and preventative measures not being taken could make the problem much bigger than it is today.

I thank the Member for moving the motion and giving the backdrop. I will not repeat that because it was comprehensive. Other Members have indicated the strength and speed of growth in a way that I cannot match, so I will not attempt to do that either. Looking at the structure of the weed, as, I suppose, it should be called, I find it shocking just how strong and persistent it is. There is no doubt that any proposal to put forward any programme will have to be as robust because it will not go away overnight; it needs something that we will commit to in the longer term and not just the short term.

Members will know that work has already been done in the House when the previous Environment Minister put forward the Northern Ireland invasive alien species strategy. The objective of that strategy, I understand, was to halt the impact on biodiversity and the economy of invasion by alien species. There is an economic impact, which is largely unmeasured at this time. There is also an impact when an invasive species — in this case, Japanese knotweed — reaches somebody's home.

People sign up to a mortgage of 20 to 25 years, and, I am sure that most Members will agree, it is probably the biggest financial investment of their life. Financial products these days are understandably very flexible and mobile and allow people to move as and when life situations change, but, when something like Japanese knotweed enters the equation, people's lives are literally put on hold. It has an impact on their family and their life choices and causes stress and worry.

We cannot shift the solution to this to the mortgage companies. Mortgage companies are in the business of measuring risk against their loan books, if you like. We need not look there for solutions, but we need to collectively look at what realistically can be done to resolve the problem.

The Environment Committee commissioned research into the existing legislation across these islands in relation to Japanese knotweed and the control of its spread into neighbouring properties. It was identified that there was no public assistance with redress for individual property owners — and that is a problem in itself. Someone who does not have the financial capacity to deal with the

problem has the frustration of knowing it is there and watching the problem become bigger as the growth spreads.

The previous Environment Minister asked the Department to undertake an analysis of the extent of the problem here. That is perhaps one of the starting points we have to consider — the extent of the problem. I do not think it has really been measured yet, and perhaps that has to be our starting point: where is the problem, where is it most prevalent and where do our resources have to be targeted?

I will go on to talk about the commissioning of the official study. We cannot pretend. In the motion we talk about a regional strategy, and in the European context there has been that acceptance that the problem is so big that it cannot be eradicated totally. Perhaps because we are on an island, we can be more ambitious in looking at long-term eradication. That will, of course, include having to look at an all-island strategy on the problem. Transport lorries are, I believe, one of the potential carriers of the seed for this problem, so it would be naive to have a robust strategy that did not consider the island of Ireland.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to conclude her remarks.

Ms S Bradley: Thank you, Mr Speaker; I will.

I thank the Members for bringing this forward. I look forward to supporting any robust eradication strategy.

Mr Ford: I congratulate Pam Cameron and her colleagues for bringing this forward. I do not think there is any need to rehearse the points that have already been made about the biology of Japanese knotweed, save to note that the research that is being done in England and Wales suggests that the only possible control is the psyllid, a Japanese insect that does not seem to thrive in the wetter climate of these islands, which presents a problem for us on an ongoing basis as to how we deal with it.

I would like to look at some of the legal options on how we can deal with the matter. I reference an answer by the previous Environment Minister, who has just been highlighted by Ms Bradley, to my colleague Chris Lyttle in June of last year on the difficulties and contradictions in our current law. As Ms Dillon has already said, it is an offence to plant or cause to grow in the wild any plant listed in Part II of schedule 9 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, which includes Japanese knotweed. However, there is no legal requirement on a landowner to control or remove existing established areas of Japanese knotweed from their land, and therefore there are no enforcement mechanisms in place to control plants that are already established. That is where we run into the difficulties that have been highlighted of individuals whose property ends up being affected by invasion from adjacent property. The question is what level of legal enforcement we should have in this jurisdiction. We have highlighted the massive blight on property owners when people are told the value of their house has dropped or someone is completely unable to sell or, as in at least one case highlighted in the media, they are unable to obtain a mortgage so they can let a property whilst buying another one.

Whilst it is undoubtedly correct that operations would need to be addressed on a North/South basis, given what we see of the transfer of waste, including contaminated soil, across the border, there is legal precedent that better comes from England and Wales at this stage to look

at how we might make progress. Is the Minister able to tell us whether she has considered the question of the introduction of ASBOs or the use of ASBOs on a wider basis to deal with problems like this and whether there should there be discussions between her Department and DOJ on how that might be done? Clearly, the possibility that now exists in England and Wales under the Infrastructure Act 2015 of imposing species control orders is one way of addressing the threat from one piece of ground to another that perhaps needs to be considered for this area.

There is no doubt that there is a significant role that the Department or NIEA could play in raising awareness of the problem. In many cases, stands of knotweed get to a point where control becomes very expensive. If people were more aware at an earlier stage, control would be rather more easily carried through. Perhaps we need to raise awareness by doing more than having a debate in the Chamber and, at least, to ensure that the NIEA gets the opportunity to publicise it, perhaps even with pictures or television coverage to show what it actually looks like. I suspect that many people do not realise what knotweed looks like until they find out the hard way how it affects them.

It is clear that we need to find ways that will stop the spread. Whilst, legally, somebody may be allowed to grow knotweed on their property, there is a real challenge in how that is done in a way that, in urban areas, does not become a threat to neighbours. That is currently not covered by the issues that we have. In that sense, the potential for species control orders may be one way in which we could ensure that action is taken at an early stage to stop the threat to others.

There are problems because so much of this happens on what is described as waste ground. There is a real need for the Department to take responsibility and direct action, if a landowner is not doing so, because of the potential threat in many cases to more than one neighbour, given what we have heard about the dangers of spread. There are significant issues. There are ways in which those matters could be carried out and charges levied, using the English legislation or something similar, on those who own the land. There is also wasteland that needs to be addressed in a different way. A lot needs to be done, and both legislation and direct action could be used by the Department, given all the constraints that, I accept, exist. There is no doubt that, otherwise, small numbers of our people will continue to suffer from this invasive weed.

Mr Middleton: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The fact that we are discussing this in the Chamber shows the seriousness with which we take it and how serious an issue it is across the Province. Japanese knotweed has affected and continues to affect many areas and properties throughout Northern Ireland. Whilst the full extent of the problem is not known, many cases have been highlighted in the media and through Members' constituency offices. My colleague mentioned the well-known case of Mr and Mrs Atkinson in north Belfast. The distress and annoyance caused is clear.

This invasive species not only destroys native plants and reduces local plant biodiversity but seriously damages buildings, land surfaces and infrastructure. There have been cases where knotweed has damaged flood defences and waterways. The implication of that is that it runs into serious financial costs of millions of pounds. Homeowners

have found that Japanese knotweed can reduce the value of their home, damage the structure of the building and create issues, as mentioned already, with mortgages when they are selling the property. Of course, the fact is that it takes years to eradicate.

A regional programme for the eradication of Japanese knotweed would be useful and could help to deal with the issue more effectively. I appreciate that such an initiative would require much attention from the Minister and much investigation of the exact cost of such a programme and the legal issues involved.

The concern for the landowners affected is that they are responsible for dealing with it. High-level, widespread control is currently not the responsibility of any of the statutory organisations. It is even more frustrating when the knotweed is coming from neighbouring, vacant premises. As MLAs, we know that trying to sort issues involving vacant private properties can be very difficult in normal everyday circumstances, never mind dealing with invasive species.

As a former member of the Environment Committee, I heard directly from those involved in the eradication of Japanese knotweed, an organisation called Knotweed NI. It was agreed that, to effectively tackle the issue, there should be cross-departmental cooperation and work with outside bodies and organisations.

11.45 am

As mentioned by my colleague as well, we need to look at other regions and areas of best practice, be it England, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland. I am pleased to hear that there is ongoing work by the Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to look at the issue. I encourage all Members here to support the motion.

Mr McMullan: The issue of Japanese knotweed has now reached epidemic heights. There needs to be clear law, responsibility and duty of care. At present, there are ASBOs and civil law to deal with the problem. Those are at a local level for people not controlling Japanese knotweed when they could reasonably be expected to do so. Whenever we talk about ASBOs, we are talking about antisocial behaviour, but I do not think people can be blamed for antisocial behaviour when dealing with this problem. The one thing missing here this morning when we talk about responsibility etc is the point that quite a lot of people cannot financially deal with it. That could be a problem in the way we deal with this.

The plant, which was introduced here in the 19th century, is ornamental. However, when it becomes very bad, it affects practically every part of life. Removing it involves considerable cost to the landowner, or else they face a fine. For example, it cost a reported £70 million to clear a 10-acre site for the London Olympics.

The motion calls on:

"the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals for a regional programme to eradicate Japanese knotweed."

While I support the motion, I believe we must see regional authorities — councils — coming on board as well. Councillors are in a daily battle with knotweed, so their

expertise will be invaluable in combating the plant. One thing we do not have is a regional map for where the plant is growing and spreading so that we can monitor its spread.

There is a difference of opinion on the best way to deal with it. Some authorities when asked by the public advise them to spray it with off-the-shelf weedkillers. Others will have a different method. We are still not being given proper advice because we are told that the off-the-shelf weedkillers we can buy ourselves are not strong enough to deal with it. We must have a clear method of treatment and, most importantly, clear advice on disposal. At present, we are failing to give proper advice to the public. That is why I ask the Minister to look into each council having a dedicated member of staff who is trained to give the correct advice to the public. I do not think we have that. We have some members of staff in councils who try their best, but they are not dedicated or trained.

We know that, when knotweed grows along watercourses, it can damage flood defence structures, which can reduce the capacity of channels to carry water. This weed can grow through concrete, tarmac and other hard-core surfaces. During the recent construction of the A8 from Larne to Belfast, problems were encountered with the weed. If you are selling your home and your neighbour's property has the plant growing on it, your property will be devalued; worse still, the mortgage company may insist the plant be treated before the sale progresses. That could hold up the sale for anything up to two years, and the cost of treatment could run into thousands of pounds.

Minister, at present, it is estimated it will cost the economy here in the region of £40 million per year. Any regional programme for the eradication of knotweed that you bring forward must have the input of all Departments and regional authorities. Also, the cost of any programme of eradication must not be left to become the sole responsibility of the Assembly or its Departments. We must be clear on the law: who is responsible? I do not believe you can have a plan for eradication, because although it is quite clear that we may not be able to eradicate this plant, we must be able to treat it and have the knowledge of how to treat it. That knowledge is missing. It is missing from the local authorities, which are on the front line when the public ask for advice. I ask that councils take that on board because it could save a lot of money in the long run.

I support the motion and thank the Member for proposing it.

Mr Irwin: This is a very timely debate. Only last week, I was approached by two constituents who had concerns about outbreaks of Japanese knotweed close to their homes in rural areas. In those instances, the weed is only a matter of feet away from their homes, which is, of course, a huge source of concern for them. In both instances, the weed is not on land in their ownership, raising the important issue of who has responsibility for control and removal, given that, under current environmental law, it is not an offence to have Japanese knotweed growing on your land.

The very word "knotweed" strikes fear into homeowners across the Province, especially as the weed is extremely difficult to control. Homeowners themselves cannot effectively and ultimately eradicate the weed without there being an evacuation of the root system. As an invasive species, knotweed, like hogweed and other species, once established, spreads easily in almost any type of

soil. When you consider that it can be spread easily by an accidental movement of the plant stem or its root system, which can grow to a depth of 3 metres and 7 metres horizontally, it is easy to understand why it is so prevalent. Even the tiniest fragment of knotweed root can produce a plant, which can then grow by up to 2 centimetres a day regardless of soil type. It can penetrate existing cracks, blockwork or concrete walls and foundations.

People are most concerned about the weed growing in close proximity to homes. There are many reported instances of homeowners being hampered, as was said, in attaining mortgages and in reselling their properties if knotweed is close to those properties. A renewed focus is certainly required to work towards the effective eradication of knotweed. Reference has been made today in the Chamber to the fears of residents across the Province who have been unfortunate enough to have been affected by this weed. Those people certainly deserve assistance in the fight against this highly invasive species.

As many reports have indicated, and as private weed control companies with the experience of dealing with knotweed can attest, dealing with this species effectively requires a range of procedures, including evacuation and safe disposal of the soil, for the best results. That, of course, may prove to be a difficult and, no doubt, costly procedure, given various access issues, particularly in built-up areas, and the high probability of services running through affected ground. Soil containing the root system has to be carefully removed and then disposed of within the current waste disposal regulations, which has an added cost.

Regardless of these difficulties, I am of the view that, as a legislature, we should respond to public concerns and come up with a suitable plan and procedure for addressing the issues that this invasive species presents, especially for homeowners, and move to an effective eradication policy. I support the motion.

Mr Allen: I join others in welcoming the motion tabled by the Members. I also welcome my party colleague Robin Swann's impending private Member's Bill.

As was mentioned, the invasive non-native plants that cause most of the problems in Northern Ireland are Japanese knotweed, giant hogweed and Himalayan balsam. In the last year, since becoming an MLA for East Belfast, I have dealt with numerous constituency enquiries about knotweed, like many Members around the House. Constituents find it virtually impossible to deal with the problems because they are not able to ascertain who owns the land from which the knotweed is growing. We are also restricted in tackling the plants because their prevalence and the location of breakouts are not recorded.

In conclusion, I will give the House an example of a recent difficulty encountered when trying to deal with Japanese knotweed.

After many hours speaking with DAERA, the council and other stakeholders, we were unable to ascertain the ownership of a piece of land with knotweed growing on it. The best advice that we were given was to place a notice on the fence at the wasteland in the hope that the landowner would see it and act. That simply is not good enough. We must do more to support those facing difficulties with non-native plants such as knotweed. I support the motion.

Ms Archibald: I, too, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Others have outlined the significant problems that Japanese knotweed causes. Its prevalence seems to be increasing, so clarity is certainly required on a strategy and measures that should be adopted to control it.

I support the motion. The problem must be tackled, and a targeted focus is required to do so. As an invasive species, as others have pointed out, Japanese knotweed poses not only a threat as a result of the damage that it does but a threat to our biodiversity. Protecting our biodiversity is a priority to mitigate climate change and the increasing threats from plant and animal diseases associated with that.

*(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)*

The biodiversity strategy to 2020 was published last year, and protecting against adverse pressures from invasive alien species forms part of that strategy. Japanese knotweed is listed, however, as one among several invasive species. The invasive alien species strategy published in 2013 set out measures and actions that should be adopted to tackle invasive species in general. They include better awareness to identify the species; detection, prevention and control measures; management; and communication. In developing any strategy to control or eradicate Japanese knotweed, a first step should be to evaluate progress made against that strategy. It is due for review this year.

As the Committee Chair said, the European Commission recently published a list of invasive species around which the Department is planning to legislate soon. Japanese knotweed is not included on that list, so it will not be subject to the measures contained in it. Explaining its absence, the European Commission indicated that the list was not exhaustive and that other species might be added. There is, however, a need to consider, as others mentioned, the legal framework for dealing with Japanese knotweed.

As has been said, the consequences of discovering Japanese knotweed on public or private land can be severe, and its eradication from property can prove very costly. It places a significant financial burden on individuals in particular, and consideration needs to be given to that, especially as the responsibility for dealing with Japanese knotweed falls to the landowner. Stopping it spreading to neighbouring properties is currently a matter of civil law under a duty of care to the neighbours. I acknowledge what Mr Swann said about developments. In that regard, an evaluation of the control measures, the legislative framework and financial considerations adopted in other states should be carried out to determine what is most effective. That would allow the strategy or measures put in place here to be informed by best practice elsewhere. Care must be taken to ensure that such measures do not place individuals in financial hardship when obligations are placed on them to deal with the problem.

This is a complex problem. As others have said, it involves multiple stakeholders, including local government and other agencies, all of which should be consulted and included in any strategy being developed.

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I thank the Members

who tabled the motion for doing so. I have listened carefully to the remarks made during the debate and with great interest. As a constituency MLA, I can cite similar cases and concerns. The problems caused by Japanese knotweed growing in the wrong place clearly cause distress to individuals and local communities and impact on our natural systems, including along our rivers. Evidence suggests that it is a growing problem, often triggered by changes in how properties are bought and sold.

Japanese knotweed is, as Members said, a bamboo-like hardy perennial that grows quickly and strongly. It was introduced in the 19th century and is invasive, spreading by its underground rhizomes or roots. It is widely established throughout Northern Ireland. The species is widespread and is especially prevalent on disused and unmanaged lands. In such locations, particularly when the ownership of the land in question is ambiguous or unknown, it is difficult for agencies or citizens to act quickly or at all. That has been highlighted throughout the debate. I recognise that this is frustrating for the individuals concerned.

12.00 noon

Japanese knotweed causes two principal problems: it impacts on our native biodiversity and on buildings and infrastructure. As Members know, my Department works with other agencies, including Transport NI, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and councils, which are all involved in some way or other in trying to control Japanese knotweed, either on their own properties or in partnership with other organisations. That activity is often associated with rivers, roads, greenways and other infrastructure routes.

The call for a regional eradication programme has, no doubt, been triggered by the more recent changes to property sales and the impact of Japanese knotweed growing close to properties. I appreciate the concerns of individual citizens, and in the debate we need to balance what can be done in the strategic sense with what we can do to help individuals affected.

The legislative situation in Northern Ireland is that, under article 15 of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, it is an offence to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild Japanese knotweed or any other invasive plant listed in Part II of schedule 9 to that Order. Anyone guilty of an offence under article 15 may be liable on summary conviction to up to six months' imprisonment or a fine of up to £5,000 or both. On conviction on indictment, they may be liable to two years' imprisonment or a fine or both. If a landowner is disposing of knotweed or any other controlled waste by cuttings or excavation, the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, as amended, is relevant. That legislation places a duty of care on anyone who produces, collects, carries, keeps, treats or disposes of controlled waste to take all the necessary steps to keep it safe and prevent it from causing harm, especially to the environment or human health.

At present, there is no statutory mechanism to compel an owner or an occupier of premises or land to control invasive alien species such as Japanese knotweed. Given the current legislative provision in Northern Ireland, the advice received from Departmental Solicitor's Office is that cases where species such as Japanese knotweed are spreading from one property to another are civil matters between landowners. I am aware of the issues surrounding that.

The effect of invasive alien species is internationally recognised as one of the main threats to the ecology of our natural environment; to that end, invasive alien species feature in the Northern Ireland biodiversity strategy. That strategy is a statutory requirement.

Some Members referred to the legislative situation in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland. Each jurisdiction has taken a slightly different approach. In England and Wales, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 is the principal legislation that deals with non-native species, and it is illegal to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any plant listed in schedule 9 to that Act. Furthermore, the Infrastructure Act 2015 amended the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to introduce new measures relating to species control legislation that have the potential to tackle invasive alien species. The species control agreements or orders are made by environmental authorities to ensure that landowners take action on invasive species or permit others to enter the land and carry out those operations to prevent their establishment and spread. The intent of the provisions is primarily to remove newly arrived invasive species or those of relatively restricted distribution; it is not envisaged that the powers will be used to control invasive species that have become widespread. Any action taken has to be demonstrated to be proportionate and cost-effective, and my Department is not aware of any cases having been taken to date.

There is also a discretionary power in England and Wales to require the landowner to clean up land that is adversely affecting the amenity of the neighbourhood. That is under section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Local authorities also have the power to undertake clean-up works and recover costs from the landowner. However, the decision on whether to take action in individual cases is a matter for the local authority concerned, which needs to take into account all the local circumstances. In addition, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 enables community protection notices to be served by local authorities or the police on individuals who act unreasonably or persistently or continually act in a way that has a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality.

The 2014 Act does not specifically or explicitly refer to Japanese knotweed or other similar, invasive, non-native species, as these powers are designed to be flexible and could be used to address specific problems caused by widespread invasive or non-native species. However, an information note has been produced on Japanese knotweed to accompany this legislation. Councils have used community protection notices to compel landowners to take action against invasive species. A report in a recent Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors' 'Building Control Journal' stated that a community protection notice was issued in Peterborough on a whole street and on an individual homeowner in Coventry who initially refused access to their garden to allow treatment of knotweed affecting the adjacent owner.

In Scotland, the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence for any person to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any non-native plant listed on schedule 9 of that legislation. Japanese knotweed is listed. The legislation is designed to prevent non-native species spreading into the wild but does not require people to

control invasive species on their land. The Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2011 amended the 1981 Act to include species control provisions to control or eradicate invasive alien species. These provisions make it possible, under certain circumstances, to compel landowners or occupiers to carry out control or eradication operations, or allow them to be carried out by the issuing authority. The orders are intended to be used when it has been impossible to reach a voluntary agreement with the owner or occupier or when action is urgently required. To date, we are not aware of these powers being used to tackle any plant species.

With regards to the Republic of Ireland —

Mr McMullan: Will the Minister give way?

Miss McIlveen: If you do not mind, I would like to move on quickly.

The Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is responsible for enforcing the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, which contain provisions to address the problem of invasive species. Regulation 49 of the 2011 regulations, relating to the prohibition on introduction and dispersal of certain species, places restrictions on the introduction of any plant species listed on part 1 of the third schedule. It is an offence for a person to plant, disperse, allow or cause to disperse, spread or cause to grow any listed plant species. Again, Japanese knotweed is listed in this schedule. The Department of Agriculture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht has indicated that it will continue to address the problem of Japanese knotweed on its own property but has no plans to tackle it in privately owned gardens.

The legislative position in Northern Ireland is arguably less robust than that in GB with respect to actual powers to intervene in problematic cases where Japanese knotweed is perceived to be a nuisance to individuals or communities. However, such legislative powers as applied in GB have not led, and are unlikely to lead, to eradication there. While it has been suggested that introduction of similar legislative intervention might be a sufficient deterrent, there is not a substantial list of enforcement case history to examine what could be applied in Northern Ireland and the relative costs and benefits. I have asked my officials to examine the options that may be available within my policy remit and the consequential financial and resource implications. That would include the potential to introduce powers similar to those available in section 215 of the England and Wales Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

The general concept of a regional eradication programme for Japanese knotweed does have merit. However, the practicalities of delivery, given the statutory basis, the likely resource costs and the possible societal expectation that government agencies will intervene with other similar or nuisance species, are something that we need to consider very carefully.

I will come to cost considerations in a moment, but, first, we need to acknowledge that an intervention programme could require significant levels of enforcement-type action given the individual rights that citizens have on their private property. There currently is no statutory basis for forcing action on individuals to remove Japanese knotweed, so any strategy would, initially at least, need to operate on a voluntary/partnership-type basis. The likely costs of a regional eradication programme are very difficult to

estimate, not least because we have an incomplete picture of actual distribution of the species, as Mr McMullan highlighted. That is especially true in urban areas, where the problem is more acute. Costs would be associated not only with the actual removal of the species — for example, herbicide spraying — but with land searches, legal costs, and restoration and reinstatement. Costs for eradication in individual cases will vary depending on the size of the infestation and the length of time the plant has been growing. One published source reported a cost of £2 million to eradicate Japanese knotweed in a 2-hectare development site in 2010. The European Environment Agency quotes a figure of €175 million being spent in the UK on control — not eradication — of the species.

Given that some treatment approaches for removal of Japanese knotweed require three to seven years, it would not be unreasonable to predict that costs of an eradication programme would increase year on year and would require ongoing budgets over a prolonged period. The question of whether there should be a regional eradication programme for Japanese knotweed raises interesting secondary questions about why we should do so for this species and not other plant species that can cause damage and whether that creates expectation and precedent that public resources be used in this way. Whilst the departmental invasive species policy has been generally focused on impacts of invasive species on natural habitats and systems, it is suggested in the building industry that Japanese knotweed is a special case where the issue is about people and property rather than just ecology. A range of other plant species can cause damage if growing near property, and some spread directly and grow on property. There is also an expectation in society that land- and property owners act responsibly with respect to neighbours, and given that there is a range of other species that readily spread or, if growing near property, can cause structural damage, there could be calls for further intervention by government agencies to resource the removal of such species.

This is an emotive and complex issue. A broad-scale eradication approach may appear desirable but would be very costly. Complete eradication would be practically difficult, if not impossible, to achieve and could raise expectations of future interventions. I believe that we should focus our attention on the worst cases, and, in looking at the policy options, my officials will certainly investigate that. Any potential change or action will not lead to an immediate solution for those directly impacted by this species right now, and so, in the meantime, I appeal to owners of land, particularly in urban areas, to take control of Japanese knotweed and, indeed, other potentially invasive or nuisance species. I also seek information from citizens and ask them to record their observations. Such information could lead to much more informed action in the local community and, indeed, inform a regional map, as was suggested. Our response needs to be targeted, focused and joined up. I will encourage my officials to continue their partnership with other Departments and to engage with the Committee and others where appropriate.

Lord Morrow: At the outset, I thank everyone who took part in the debate. It has come across very clearly that there is an issue that needs to be tackled; that has been acknowledged right around the House today. I also want to thank the Minister for coming here today, taking part in the

debate, listening to the comments of all the Members and, of course, speaking on the issue.

This is not the first time that this matter has been discussed. When I was a member of the Environment Committee, it was the subject of lengthy discussion and debate. One thing that comes out very clearly is that this is not a simple issue or an issue that will go away. Indeed, it may get worse as the years go by. Therefore, turning our heads and looking the other way is not the answer. It has to be tackled, and a strategy has to be put in place that will tackle the issue in some way. The Minister is right when she says that we should focus our attention on the worst cases. That is the proper approach. I commend the Minister for accepting that there is a big issue out there. We will not underestimate it; we will state that it will not be simple or straightforward to resolve. No one believes that it will be.

12.15 pm

I had a case in my town where a developer was doing a development of houses and, of course, the work had to come to a halt. That scheme was held up for two years because of the emergence or appearance of knotweed. That, of course, adds to costs and expenses, and all of us in the House can turn to situations where there is a housing need. We have a massive housing need across Northern Ireland, whether it is north, south, east or west. These issues do not help in any way and only serve to make a bad situation infinitely worse.

I have to say to Sinn Féin that its Members have been a bit more what I would call “constructive” today than they were when the issue came before Mid Ulster council. One of my colleagues tabled a motion, and Sinn Féin said that it could not support it because the council could not do anything about it. They were not being asked to do that; they were being asked to lobby the Minister and the Department. I cannot for the life of me remember — my mind goes blank — who the Minister was at that time. It was about a year or so ago, and someone can tell me. What Sinn Féin was guilty of at that time was that it was looking at who was saying something, rather than what was being said. That seems to be a common fault in Northern Ireland: we seem to look at who is saying the thing rather than at what is being said. That was not their approach today. They have manned up and “womaned” up — yes — and said that there is an issue and we need to tackle it.

Mr Swann referred to the fact that he is tabling a private Member's Bill, and I wish him well on that. We look forward to that coming to the surface when that day comes. No doubt that will be a constructive piece of work, and, hopefully, it will go some distance towards tackling the real issue.

The challenge for the Minister and the Department is in whether our legislation is as robust as that of GB. My information — I do not say it in a critical way — is that it may not be. There comes a time when you have to grasp the nettle — or, in this case, the knotweed. We need to look at where we are behind GB and why our legislation is not as robust and fit for purpose as that in the rest of the United Kingdom. Somebody posed the idea — it was more of a distraction — that we should look at what the Irish Republic is doing and do a joint venture. Look, folks: what we need to do in this country is look after our own affairs first. That is where our responsibility lies and where

the Minister's duties are. I exhort her and her Department to take a close, long, hard look at the present legislation, study it and see how we can come up to speed if we are behind.

The Minister said — I noted it — that there was a summary fine of something like £5,000 or two years' imprisonment or, worse still, both. I wonder how many fines there have been over the past five years or, indeed, if there have been any. Some say that, if we take further action, we will put more obstacles in the way of farmers; I do not think so. Whilst I have the greatest sympathy with landowners who discover that, through no action of theirs, they have a problem with knotweed, nevertheless, as I said, I do not think that turning a blind eye or turning our heads and looking the other way is the answer. It is not an issue that will go away.

I urge the Minister and her Department to do all that she can in her tenure to ensure that the problem is tackled to the best of her ability. It is a complex one — no one ever said that it was anything different — and it will be very difficult for the Minister and her Department to really get into it. Who else can we look to? We cannot. Figures of millions of pounds are being put out as the amount of money that will be needed to tackle the issue. Let us deal with it and follow her lead. She has said that we will deal with the worst cases first and move from there. I think that the Assembly is quite happy to support that approach, but we need change, and it needs to come very soon.

I thank everyone who took part. I know that the Minister and her Department are not complacent — they are acutely aware of the issue — but more could have been done in the past, and I look now to more being done. No doubt the House will monitor the issue closely in the weeks and months ahead. It received a lengthy discussion in the old Environment Committee. I appreciate what the organisation calling itself Knotweed NI is doing, but there needs to be a new impetus. I believe that the Minister is the right person to give it.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals for a regional programme to eradicate Japanese knotweed.

Road Maintenance Budget Deficit

Madam Principal 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 to wind. One amendment has been selected and is published on the Marshalled List. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the amendment and five minutes to wind. All other Members will have five minutes.

Mr Mullan: I beg to move

That this Assembly is concerned that the road structural maintenance budget deficit is currently estimated to be £1 billion; notes the importance of road maintenance to road safety, especially in rural areas; further notes that it is estimated that over £137 million per annum is needed to adequately maintain, in its current state, the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to include a ring-fenced allocation to his Department's baseline budget for road maintenance repair that will facilitate a more strategic and, consequently, efficient approach to road maintenance.

I welcome the opportunity to present the motion to the Assembly on an issue that many constituents raised with me on the doorstep as I canvassed for the May election. I am pleased that the Minister is here to respond, and I look forward to hearing the contributions of other Members. I also welcome the Alliance Party amendment, which I will address later.

The SDLP has tabled the motion because, as we approach the winter months, there are serious concerns among the public and Transport NI officials about what might happen to the condition of our roads. Most importantly, people are concerned about the lack of maintenance and, as we have witnessed throughout my constituency in recent months, the possibility of even more road deaths.

It is widely accepted that the condition of Northern Ireland's roads is vital to the economic and social well-being of the North. Adequately maintaining our road infrastructure is essential to preserving and enhancing those benefits and attracting much-needed inward investment. It is therefore important that, in the new mandate, the Chamber recognises that and ensures that road maintenance receives the necessary funding allocation to bring our road network up to an acceptable standard.

For a number of years, the quality and frequency of maintenance provided to the roads network has suffered due to insignificant funding. A number of major reports and pieces of commentary highlight the detrimental impact of that. Perhaps most important, in my view, is Professor Snaith's report of 2009, which stated the need for significantly enhanced investment to carry out much-needed maintenance repair work across Northern Ireland. The Snaith report also states that historical levels of funding are unsustainable and underinvestment has created a vicious circle. As roads deteriorate through lack of planned maintenance, they require expensive patching to avoid public liability claims and maintain road safety. That draws funding away from good-value resurfacing and surface dressing. That is an important point as, over the years, we have seen a short-term patchwork approach to

maintenance projects, especially with the temporary filling of potholes and other road surface defects, which does not deal with the issue and costs more further down the line.

We are now some seven years on from the publication of that report, and I have not seen any concerted effort to address the funding shortfall. That is having severe ramifications for many road users across the North. In my constituency of East Derry, there is growing anger and frustration among local people about the decline in the state of the road network. They are angry that the issue does not get the attention it deserves from the Executive or the Minister. Each week, I have constituents contacting me from places like Kilrea, Glenullin and Ballerin concerning the condition of the roads and the crater-like potholes they have to avoid on a daily basis while travelling to work or leaving their children to school. Those unrepaired potholes can cause serious damage to many cars on our roads. Last year, 600 claims were made against the Department for Regional Development for damage to vehicles caused by the state of our roads. Almost 200 of those came from the north-west of the Province, which is testament to the state the roads are in. The Department is paying compensation and losing money due to the historical failure to take strategic action. There are also concerns in East Derry about road safety measures, especially on the Agivey Road, the Drumeil Road and roads around Feeny and Foreglen. After a number of road deaths, people are concerned that road safety measures may not be at an adequate standard. I welcome the Minister's view on that.

Turning to the motion, we have also learned over the past 12 months of the colossal backlog concerning the road maintenance programme, which is now estimated to be £1 billion. That backlog is having severe consequences across each and every constituency. It has limited flooding measures, gully cleaning, pothole repair and investment in road safety measures. We see many parts of our roads that have been marked for repair but have yet to be fixed. I ask the Minister this: how much does his Department spend on assessment versus physical repair? It has been independently assessed that the overall annual budgetary requirement for just maintaining our roads is between £137 million and £141 million. That money is to simply keep our roads in the condition they are in; it is not meant for any service improvement. That is a scary situation when you consider the state of many roads across the network.

It is easy to see that, in the past number of years, the budget allocation given to roads maintenance has fallen substantially below the figure required. The 2015-16 opening allocation was a mere £22 million. This year it is slightly better, at £46 million, but that is still £95 million short of what is required. I do not see any attempt in the draft Programme for Government framework to address that. I welcome the new Minister's commitment to road maintenance since he came into post, which includes his announcement of a £10 million rural roads initiative fund. He also secured additional funding for road repair through the June monitoring round. Along with the progression of the A5 and A6, these are all positive developments with a focus on the west. However, with these additional funds in place, we are still tens of millions of pounds away from what is required.

12.30 pm

The motion is not about criticising the current Minister or the current funding shortfall in the road maintenance budget. It is simply calling for a ring-fenced allocation in the Department's budget that would allow for a more strategic approach to road maintenance than having a patchwork service that is almost wholly reliant on monitoring rounds to fund essential and critical road maintenance. There is an urgent need to reform how road maintenance is budgeted and planned.

I welcome the Alliance Party's amendment in calling for a costed strategic plan. I think that, under normal circumstances, that call is worth merit. However, it fails to appreciate that, until now, strategic planning has been limited due to an over-reliance on in-year monitoring, which has resulted in a haphazard approach to road maintenance. We cannot have another costed plan with no incentive for the Minister and Department to adhere strictly to it. The SDLP believes that the only way to implement a strategic plan is to ring-fence the Department's maintenance budget. We therefore cannot accept the Alliance amendment.

Any motion concerning infrastructure investment always comes down to how we pay for it. If we agree that there is a need to increase the road maintenance budget to £137 million, we need to forensically examine the Department's budget and the Executive Budget. Departmental responsibilities, for example, have transferred from the Executive Office, but money has not followed this. The Minister must also put the case to his Executive colleague the Minister of Finance to ensure that sufficient funding is provided. All revenue-raising options that do not penalise the poor must also be put on the table and thoroughly considered.

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

Mr Mullan: In conclusion, I hope that this is a good debate, the main theme of which is to improve road maintenance programmes. The infrastructure of the North is much too important to neglect.

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

Mr Mullan: We do not want to exacerbate further the condition of our roads.

Ms Armstrong: I beg to move the following amendment:

Leave out all after "Infrastructure" and insert

"to develop and publish a costed strategic plan for road maintenance and repair that will be included as part of the Department for Infrastructure's ongoing work programme from 2017-18 until the end of the mandate."

On behalf of the Alliance Party, I welcome the SDLP motion, but, as my amendment confirms, I seek to make the intention more robust by asking the Minister and his Department to develop and, importantly, publish:

"a costed strategic plan for road maintenance and repair that will be included as part of the Department for Infrastructure's ongoing work programme",

for the next financial year, 2017-18, and to confirm the requirements that the Department will need to deliver the

capital structural maintenance programme until the end of this mandate.

The amendment is important because the Department could decide to ring-fence any amount to include in the budget, which may or may not make a dent in the amount of money and work needed to make any significant difference to the deplorable state of our existing roads. Northern Ireland needs a systematic road maintenance strategy that lasts for at least 20 years. The amendment calls for the Minister and his Department to develop such a strategy and to provide a costed, target-based action plan to deliver results in this mandate. This approach will initiate the process of addressing the outrageous £1 billion backlog in road maintenance that was identified by the House of Commons Select Committee.

That backlog is evident to everyone in the Chamber. Every day, I see it when I commute along roads pitted with potholes. I see the crumbling road edges, the hedges overgrown on to the road and the flooding caused by gullies not yet cleared. I see the footpaths that are so overgrown with weeds that people with limited mobility complain that they can no longer walk safely to their local shop because of the trip hazards. I see the damaged and missing road signs. I see the lack of or worn road markings. I listen to the radio and hear about road collapses in Belfast or another set of lights out at a busy junction.

I see the reports of the number of claims being paid out in compensation for vehicle damage. Last year, almost 2,000 claims were made, totalling £210,000. I wonder how high the figure will go this year.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Member for giving way. Will she agree with me that the lack of weed control on footpaths and roads is now leading to serious surface damage and that that in itself will place a greater burden on repairs? If the Minister had proceeded to deal with the spraying of weeds, he would not now be facing additional bills for weeds damaging road surfaces.

Ms Armstrong: I agree with the Member on that. Perhaps a strategy would help.

The backlog in road maintenance is affecting the everyday lives of citizens. It is affecting businesses and will reduce our attractiveness and competitiveness as a region aiming to grow its inward investment.

One billion pounds is a huge figure. That backlog will not be dealt with in this mandate. The strategic plan can, however, help create —

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Ms Armstrong: Yes, certainly.

Mr F McCann: The Minister announced, I think on 26 June, an additional £5 million for grass-cutting and weed-spraying to try to deal with the problem that the Member is speaking about.

Ms Armstrong: I will address that shortly.

The strategic plan can, however, help create opportunities to address the issue. I accept that there needs to be a sensible and balanced consideration as to how we achieve safer roads while faced with a reducing reactive maintenance budget. One way is to rebalance the amount of capital expenditure being used for new roads with the amount being used for structural maintenance. In this day

and age, when money is tight, we should look after what we already have.

The Finance Minister, Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, accused me of wanting to stop all the Executive's flagship projects because I questioned whether the time was right to build all of them at the same time. I have no problem with building new roads if we have the money for them. In the light of what will happen to our Budgets during this mandate, I do not believe that now is the right time to commit to spending money that we do not yet have.

If the Department ensures that capital money is invested in structural road maintenance, it will reduce the need for reactive maintenance and therefore reduce the ongoing pressure on the infrastructure resource budget, as well as delivering much-needed investment for the contracting industry, preventing job losses. That balanced approach cannot be achieved through sporadic and piecemeal funding obtained through monitoring rounds. The Executive need to address the ongoing issue of failing road maintenance by ensuring that infrastructure has the right investment, as identified in a costed strategic road maintenance plan.

If the Minister aims to improve transport connections for people, goods and services as outlined in the Programme for Government framework, the existing road network must be appropriately maintained. It is not appropriate to depend on monitoring round money. A better way is to have a fully costed business case confirming the actual investment needed to deliver a systematic programme of repair until at least the end of this mandate. Perhaps by 2020 we can see whether any real difference has been made to the safety and state of our roads. After all, as departmental officials have admitted, public liability claims rose by 88% in the first three months of 2016. Public safety is being jeopardised because many of our roads are not fit for purpose. Professional reports have already warned that unfit roads will mean an increase in compensation claims. I hope that unfit and unsafe roads will not lead to personal injury or worse for our citizens.

The Department should be capable of delivering this costed strategic plan. There are enough professionals employed in Transport NI who can identify and cost out road maintenance. The Department is adept at procuring contractors. Any contractor or grant recipient is expected to provide a costed business case. Therefore, it should not take an extraordinary amount of time or expenditure on external advice to deliver a costed strategic plan in time for consideration for the 2017-18 Budget and the capital requirements for the rest of the mandate.

The capital investment will resurface stretches of road that, quite simply, have no surface. Believe me, I can take the Minister to several places in my constituency where roads have no surface, where multiple potholes have merged to create a moon-like surface, where there are roads that are ignored under the Minister's 1,000 rural roads programme, where there are roads that are increasingly dangerous yet remain excluded from the Minister's focus and where there are roads where patching over patches has not worked. There needs to be a systematic review of the criteria used to determine when roads are resurfaced rather than constantly patched. How many times does the same stretch of road need to be patched before someone will have the gumption to resurface it?

I believe that the system is being hampered by the budget, not just the lack of budget but the ability to move from revenue to capital expenditure, as and when required. In the departmental briefing to the Infrastructure Committee on 18 June, the Department confirmed that it has been independently established that over £100 million, that is £141 million per annum updated to 2016 prices, is needed to adequately maintain the structural integrity of the country's road network. The briefing went on to say that, if the bid is not met, the cost of reactive patching is likely to increase, drawing funding away from good value maintenance activities such as resurfacing and surface dressing. The Department knows that the current maintenance system is not value for money. Current investment is more akin to knee-jerk spending as and when the crumbs fall from monitoring-round tables. The dependence on monitoring round money to repair our roads is simply unacceptable.

The plan should include revenue commitments from 2017 to the end of this mandate to ensure that roads are in a safe, functional condition and not scarcely meeting safety standards. In 2016, Snaith reviewed the maintenance funding requirements. Seven years ago, he highlighted the need for a maintenance budget that should sustain and improve the road network to a proper standard so that it will provide safe and comfortable transportation in an economic manner. By ensuring that there is ongoing appropriate resource funding, the Minister will enable investment in Transport NI to ensure that small potholes are filled quickly and effectively; drains are cleared, reducing flooding and increasing safety; appropriate hedge cutting and weeding will take place; and that grit is available this and every winter.

Northern Ireland has an international reputation as a place of opportunity and beauty. If we want to attract investment to encourage business and to provide connectivity for local people, we need infrastructure that works. Let us be honest: our roads are our biggest asset. We have the longest road network in the UK. We are highly dependent on roads, yet we lag behind all other regions because not enough investment is made into our infrastructure. Let us get a lot more clever about how we invest. The only way that we can do this is through better strategic planning and less dependence on monitoring rounds to provide appropriate investment in our roads.

Mr Humphrey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Infrastructure): I welcome the opportunity to speak as Chair of the Committee and to outline the Committee for Infrastructure's consideration of views on the financial issues relating to road maintenance. This is a matter that the Committee took up with the Minister on his first briefing to the Committee, on 8 June 2016, and again with the director of finance at his briefing to the Committee, on 15 June. During the briefing, the Committee sought clarification on the £1 billion estimate for the infrastructure deficit in road maintenance. The Minister and his officials explained that the £1 billion figure comes out of an estimate of the total that it would cost to invest in the current road infrastructure to bring it all up to the requisite standard. The officials said that the Department calculates this figure regularly so is well versed in how the figure should be brought forward so that the Department is constant in its workings and costings. The officials admitted that the backlog is getting longer and that the cost is increasing.

During the finance briefing on 15 June, the officials outlined that they were coping with a £21 million budget reduction. However, this had been offset by a £20 million addition to the budget, which was primarily for road maintenance. Officials acknowledged to the Committee that, in recent years, the Department had been spending less on road maintenance. The Minister and his officials advised the Committee:

"In recent years and certainly in the last couple of years, we have not been able to invest as much as we would ideally wish to maintain the road network to that standard".

The officials also pointed out that, in 2015-16, a roads overspend was only averted through an in-year monitoring round allocation of £16.5 million and that there is a continuing pressure on the Department's road maintenance budget. The officials pointed out that Transport NI will not be fully funded in the 2016-17 year to meet instant requirements for road maintenance, including a winter service. The Department said that it had been able to identify the funding of around £15.5 million in 2016-17 to help to fund that service, mainly through staff savings and reductions in the street lighting energy contract. However, a funding gap remains in Transport NI's ability to fund its maintenance service.

The Committee asked the Minister to ensure that rural roads have a fair allocation of the road maintenance budget. Members from rural constituencies pointed out that such are the delays in patch work that it is a false economy, costing the Department more to put it right in the long run. Indeed, one member quoted the House of Commons Select Committee that identified that reactive works cost as much as 10 times more than planned maintenance programmes.

The example was given of a C-class road that was checked every nine months. That means that, if a pothole is below the threshold today, it would not be checked again for another nine months and would then be a major pothole. The Minister pointed out that in rural areas such as south Down, Strangford and south Armagh the road infrastructure may not be what it is in other places. He also acknowledged that the sense of isolation in rural communities needs to be addressed and that he would do what he could within his budgetary constraints.

12.45 pm

During the briefing, the Committee asked the Minister if he would be going to the Executive for additional funds to deal with road maintenance. He advised that road safety is his Department's statutory obligation and that he was looking for further finance to go into the area. Officials pointed out that the Department had reduced the inspection frequency for potholes, that some of the lower categories of defects are not being repaired, simply because there is not enough money at present, and that, if further money comes through the system in monitoring rounds, the service will be ramped back up.

When the issue of programme repairs was raised with the Minister, he said that it was ongoing but it was about prioritisation and utilising whatever money the Department had to get best value out of it. Officials were asked if they could give details of how much additional money is being distributed per constituency for road maintenance. They

indicated that it was too early to come up with that detail but that money would be shared proportionately across the region, particularly to address areas where there is greatest need.

The Committee also raised road safety issues surrounding the failure to cut the grass at major junctions and the fact that, in some areas, local people have to cut the grass back themselves. The Minister said he would engage with officials on innovative and technical solutions to those problems and cited the use of the farming community during the snow in recent years. The Committee hopes that the Minister for Infrastructure will continue with that engagement.

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

Mr Humphrey: We look forward to working with the Minister on a regular basis around it.

I would also make the point that Members need to remember that, regarding investment and infrastructure, over 40 years of a terrorist campaign money obviously had to go into providing security for the people of Northern Ireland.

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

Mr McAleer: I welcome the motion before the House today. This is a very serious motion, and it deserves in-depth consideration. We have had similar motions relating to the structural maintenance of our road network before. As one of the MLAs who represent a very rural constituency, I appreciate the importance of the issue. In rural parts of mid and west Tyrone, we can see the state of the roads. It is important that we recognise that we are dealing with a history of underinvestment in the west. The state of our road network at local level and at strategic level is indicative of the historical imbalance that we have west of the Bann. It is good that we have a motion today that shines a light on that and looks at this important issue.

Regarding funding, we had a motion in the House yesterday from the Ulster Unionist Party where we looked at our future beyond the EU. During that debate, I made the point that the North had secured £100 million of investment in infrastructure and transport in the last 10 years. Obviously, the prospect of leaving the EU will have a serious impact on the funding that might be available for departmental projects. We also learned recently that we are looking at cuts from Westminster in the region of £3.5 billion, and that, no doubt, will be by 2019 or 2020. There is also no doubt that those cuts will be passed on here as well and will put extra pressures on the Department and all Departments in the North.

Last week, Fra and I and, I am sure, other parties had a meeting with Gordon Best, the chief of the Quarry Products Association (QPA). They recognise the fact that we had a starting point of £22 million for structural maintenance in last year's budget; this year, that was substantially increased to £46 million. In response to concerns from MLAs and the wider constituency, the Minister introduced an additional £10 million funding for the rural roads initiative, and parts of my constituency and other rural areas have greatly benefited from that and are seeing delivery on the ground of that important initiative taken by the Minister.

That raises the point that the SDLP has made previously that we are wholly reliant on in-year monitoring; however, that is not the case. We have a starting point this year that is substantially better than last year, and there will be opportunities in future monitoring rounds to bid for additional funding.

It is important to draw on comments made by the Alliance Party and the SDLP. Yes, there is a desire to reach for the £137 million per annum for our existing network, but it is also important to recognise where the money will come from. I note that reference was made to the funding that is allocated to strategic projects, so what is it? Which strategic projects do the SDLP and the Alliance Party want to halt? Do they want to halt the Ballynahinch bypass, the A5 or the A6? Where do they want to take the money from to maintain our existing road network? There is no magic money tree. There are cuts coming down the line from Westminster, and Brexit will give us additional challenges, so, rather than presenting wish lists of what they would like to see — what we would all like to see — it is important to come up with answers. Where in the Department should money be shuffled from to fund structural maintenance?

In conclusion, I welcome the motion, which shines a light on a very important subject, and we will be happy to support it.

Mrs Palmer: I thank those who tabled the motion for bringing it to the Chamber. It is, without doubt, a vital issue that is in danger of being obscured by the Department's focus on large prestige projects. Simply put, maintaining the roads is not the most exciting or interesting aspect of governance. It gives precious few opportunities for press conferences or photo opportunities; indeed, the idea of well-maintained roads might worry some representatives here who routinely appear in their local paper frowning over a pothole in a high-vis jacket.

In the past, every effort seems to have been made to deprive the old DRD of essential funding for road maintenance for purely political purposes. That was a shameful game of politics, and the current Executive have now found themselves a victim of the unreasonable budget constraints that they created in a manner similar to their treatment of the Health Department, I can only hope that the Executive's response to the road maintenance crisis is better than their management of the health service in the last mandate. As a result, it is of the utmost importance that that toxic legacy be addressed. Having a £1 billion deficit hanging over the head of the Department puts future projects and the safety of every person using our roads in jeopardy.

Mr Humphrey: Will the Member give way?

Mrs Palmer: I will, maybe, when I have finished.

The patchwork approach to maintenance, where it seems that the squeakiest wheels get the oil, rather than going about it in a more measured and planned fashion, cannot continue. The haphazard approach whereby the bare minimum is spent on holding things together must end.

The crucial point is that it takes an estimated £137 million per year simply to maintain what we have. In terms of the motion, the Assembly should be concerned that the road structural maintenance deficit is estimated to be £1 billion. Only last week, the Ulster Unionist Party launched the document 'A Vision for Northern Ireland outside the

EU', in which we identified 10 key asks, one of which was the trebling of investment in infrastructure, including hard infrastructure, such as our airports, roads and railways.

As part of the document, we urged the Executive to treble their investment in infrastructure. That will require making the case to Her Majesty's Government that some of the funding currently being directed to Brussels should be used to increase Northern Ireland's competitiveness.

The issue is only set to become more acute in the future, given the imminent withdrawal of EU funding and our potential ineligibility to apply for future EU structural funding for large projects. An example of that is the TEN-T funding, of which we stand to lose £58 million. That money must be found if departmental plans are not revised. I am deeply concerned that the funding for basic road maintenance is seen as easy pickings for projects that extend beyond 2020 Treasury assurances.

The maintenance of our roads must be the number one priority of the Department for Infrastructure. Poorly maintained roads contribute to road accidents and deaths, and it is important that everything in the Department's power is done to ensure that every road is as safe as possible. The fundamental suggestion in the motion — to ring-fence an amount specifically for road maintenance — has real merit, although further analysis of the exact amount, as well as the mechanisms to ensure that it is regularly reviewed, would obviously be essential. The very nature of development means that, as Northern Ireland grows, those costs will grow.

The issue must be addressed sooner rather than later. The current approach of spreading the funding as wide and as shallow as possible is merely papering over the cracks. If a more intensive and systemic approach is not taken, the hidden stresses on Roads Service will continue to build until it simply cracks, like our poorly maintained roads.

Mr Humphrey: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. To be fair, I do not think that the huge deficit in the investment required in infrastructure across Northern Ireland and, in particular, in roads, the issue that we are dealing with, has been the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Executive since this place has been established. Surely it is because of years of lack of investment by Her Majesty's Government because money and valuable resource had to go into providing security in Northern Ireland. Will the Member accept that point?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mrs Palmer: Yes, I accept that that was a major issue in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, but I do not accept that the balance between capital and revenue is correct to deliver the infrastructure that we need to maintain.

Mrs Barton: I thank the Member for giving way. Does the Member not agree that many of the repairs that have been done in recent years just appear to be a sticking plaster to the solution because of the lack of strategic planning? Yes, potholes and edge failures are repaired, but, in many instances, this continues to be only a temporary solution as there appears to be little maintenance budget diverted towards investigating the real causes of such faults, such as drainage problems. We need to divert more money there.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that, when Members are good enough to take an intervention, the intervention should be brief.

Mrs Palmer: I support the motion and have no quarrel with the amendment. I hope that we can expect a more strategic and, consequently, efficient approach to road maintenance in the future.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet at 1.00 pm. Therefore, I propose, 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 12.57 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Justice

Prisoner Rehabilitation

1. **Ms Dillon** asked the Minister of Justice what her Department is doing to ensure that Prison Service staff possess the necessary skills to assist in prisoner rehabilitation. (AQO 265/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): A wide-ranging training programme has been put in place for all newly appointed custody prison officers. This nine-week programme has been developed with rehabilitation as its focus, in line with my priorities as Minister, equipping new staff with the necessary knowledge to assist those in custody to positively change. During the training, staff are taught how to challenge appropriately, signpost to services and assist those committed into our care. They are taught how to engage with each individual prisoner, in terms of their risks, needs and strengths. Within one year, staff successfully completing the training requirements will receive a certificate of competence.

In August this year the Prison Service promoted 43 new senior officers across the three establishments. A new training programme has been developed for these staff which places rehabilitation at the centre of everything they do, and that will be delivered in November. This will equip these new managers with a rehabilitative approach and knowledge of the skills required both of them and their staff. For staff and prisoner development units, which deliver rehabilitation on a daily basis, a range of training such as risk assessment, desistance and interventions is provided to equip staff with the necessary skills to assist prisoner rehabilitation. Delivery of this training is in partnership with Probation Service, the public protection unit, the PSNI and other key agencies.

I am committed to having in place training arrangements for new and existing prison staff which empower and enable them to work positively with prisoners to assist in their rehabilitation, and thus contribute to making Northern Ireland safer.

Ms Dillon: I thank the Minister for her answer. The Minister will be aware that it is widely accepted that prison officer engagement with prisoners is the first stage in the rehabilitation process. However, in the past there was a policy in prisons here of non-engagement. Concerns have been raised that such a culture may still exist among some prison staff. Can the Minister give an assurance that she will raise this issue with the new director of the Prison Service when he or she is appointed?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. The fact that we are putting rehabilitation at the focus of our training for new custody officers and senior officers should ensure that there is a real sense of engagement in order to rehabilitate. I have made a number

of visits around our prison establishment and estate, and I do not see that sense of disengagement amongst prison staff and prisoners. However, I take the point. If you believe it to be an issue for the people that you represent, I am quite happy to raise it with the new director-general when he or she is in post.

Mr Beattie: Given the challenging nature of supervision and delivery of rehabilitation, does the Minister believe that a staff level of 31 officers at Her Majesty's Prison Maghaberry for 870 inmates for overnight supervision, including the periodic monitoring of up to 25 prisoners at risk, is not only inadequate but is not appropriate given the recent Prisoner Ombudsman's report on Sean Lynch?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I do recognise that there are challenges within our Prison Service, some of which you have alluded to. I am keen to look at those challenges and see, first and foremost, how we can better support our prison officers. Working within a prison is a challenging environment — it really is like no other. I am certainly keen to look at how we can better support prison officers, and that might include some of his suggestions. When we get the new director-general in post we will look forward to having those discussions.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does the Minister recognise the exceptional needs of prisoners and, indeed, prison service staff — I hear her alluding to that already, and I welcome that — by way of mental health care? Does she agree that mental health issues need to be addressed in order to assist in prisoner rehabilitation?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her supplementary question. By all means, yes. Mental health issues, right across all public services, are something we need to give focus to. There is a legacy with the fact that we are a post-conflict society. A lot of people who may have been either directly or indirectly affected by the trauma of the Troubles, are now realising that in their retirement years when they have more time to think because they do not have the distractions of a job.

Coming back to my area of interest, yes, by all means, we should consider prison officers and prisoners. It has been said to me that a quarter of my prisoners have mental health issues. That is something that we need to look at. Do we need to look at the prison estate? Is it fit for purpose? How are we interacting with prisoners on a day-to-day basis? However, I cannot do this alone. It is something that I am keen to work on with the Health Minister in the Executive. We have already had discussions around how we can tackle mental health issues, particularly within prisons, and also to support staff.

Mr Attwood: The Minister and all Members will be very aware of the distressing Prisoner Ombudsman report that was published in the first week of September. Will the Minister confirm that she has called in prison management in respect of that report? What did you say to them, if you met them? How will you ensure that the 63 recommendations in the report will be fully, quickly and faithfully implemented?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I do not shy away from the fact that it was a damning report, and certainly there were a number of recommendations that, as an organisation, the Northern Ireland Prison Service, along with the South Eastern Trust, will be looking

at. Those recommendations were put forward for both organisations working together. I have had a conversation about it, and I think that we need to look at staff training. This was an exceptional mental health case. To be honest, our officers were not equipped to deal with that exceptional case. We need to look at how we can better equip officers to deal with those sorts of cases. Severe lessons have been learned from that, and I will ensure that we do.

Mr Dickson: Thank you Minister. Will you tell us what your target is for the level of Prison Service resourcing for employment and skills and for health and well-being?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I am quite keen to look at how we can modernise the Prison Service so that we can look at the needs of prison officers. Thankfully, we have more women coming to work in the Prison Service. We will have to look at their needs and those of their families. We also need to look at how we can better support them, perhaps in the shift patterns. We are looking at a new modernisation programme. I am reluctant to state figures; I think that that is what the Member is trying to get at. I think that it needs to be a wider review of how we can better support prison officers.

Peace Walls

2. **Mr Allen** asked the Minister of Justice what progress her Department is making on the removal of peace walls. (AQO 266/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department leads on the delivery of the Executive commitment contained in the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC) strategy in respect of the removal of peace walls by 2023 and is seeking to bring about the conditions that can enable people to support their removal. I remind Executive colleagues of the importance of supporting delivery through the work of their Departments.

At the outset of this work, dating back to the last Programme for Government commitment, my Department was responsible for 59 structures situated in Belfast, Portadown, Lurgan and Londonderry. To date, nine structures have been removed completely, along with parts of four others. Within the T:BUC interface programme, we also incorporate structures belonging to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The reduction in the number of structures has been possible only through effective partnership working between Departments, statutory agencies, the voluntary and community sector, and communities themselves. I must, however, note the difficulty in establishing effective partnership working whilst working within the current annual Budget cycles. I recognise that, in many respects, current financial planning cycles are outside our control; nevertheless, I echo the views of our key delivery partners that a long-term funding model is needed for good planning and effective delivery.

I fully recognise the challenges that remain around the removal of peace walls. They are multifaceted, and that is why we have established a programme board, comprising relevant Departments and agencies, which is responsible for providing advice at a strategic level with particular focus on four key areas: social, community, physical, and economic regeneration.

Mr Allen: I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, can you advise what work your Department is undertaking, alongside your Executive colleagues, to support and assist those living on the peace lines?

Ms Sugden: I thank Mr Allen for his main and supplementary questions. We are working together to establish a solution to this problem. Ultimately, it will not be the Executive that will bring down peace walls; it will be the communities themselves. I think that it is important that they are part of the conversations in doing so. There are a lot of issues around the peace walls. Some people look at them almost as a safety blanket or a comfort, but I am keen to get out onto the ground and work with the various agencies, and I ask my Department officials to do that also. As I alluded, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has an interest, and local PCSPs also have an input.

First and foremost, however, it is about the communities living around these walls. To answer your question more specifically: we are working together and are going to try to do what we can to work towards our 2023 target.

Ms Mallon: Given that paramilitarism has often been the context and backdrop against which many of the peace walls have been built, can the Minister confirm how many times the cross-departmental board, chaired by Justice, has met since the Executive published an action plan on 19 July to address paramilitary activity?

Ms Sugden: Regrettably, I do not have that figure to hand, but I will say that this forms part of the wider work we are doing on ending paramilitary action. You referred to the very difficult challenge of trying to move this work forward. I see it; I have spoken to communities in these areas, and I know there is a sense of fear amongst them. It is about how we work through that. I am of the mind, though, that we have to speak to these individuals — they have to be part of the process — and, certainly, I am keen to do that as part of the wider work to tackle paramilitarism and meet the peace wall target for 2023.

Mr Douglas: On Sunday night, I spoke to a group of young students from John Brown University in Arkansas. The question they asked me was this: how do we take the peace walls down? My answer to them was that the most important people we need to talk to are those living in those areas. I live one mile from a peace line, but I may as well live in Arkansas. Does the Minister agree that the key people in all this are those living at the interface?

Ms Sugden: Certainly, and in my response to Mr Allen, I agreed that, ultimately, the people who will take the walls down are those living in the areas affected, but we need to provide them with support so that they feel supported to bring them down and do not have that fear. It is such an intractable issue, particularly in some areas. That is why I am keen, along with other Departments, to really engage within communities and with the various agencies, the community and voluntary groups and the people they represent. I put this challenge to the rest of the House: you have a responsibility as community and political representatives to play your part in trying to solve this; it is not my job alone.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I advise Members that question 11 has been withdrawn.

HMP Magilligan: New Build

3. **Mr M Bradley** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the new build for HMP Magilligan. (AQO 267/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An outline business case for the redevelopment of Magilligan prison was approved by the Department of Finance in January 2015. Project delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. That will be considered as part of the process of setting the next budget. I will not, unfortunately, be able to confirm when the rebuilding of Magilligan prison will commence until capital funding is secured. I am, though, fully committed to providing a redeveloped prison at Magilligan to enable the Northern Ireland Prison Service to deliver essential programmes to address reoffending behaviour, meet Disability Discrimination Act standards and replace the existing infrastructure, which has outlived its useful purpose and is expensive and inefficient to staff, maintain and operate.

Mr M Bradley: Thank you, Minister, for that response. You partly answered the next question. How soon will work on the new prison start? How long will it take you to build it? You have no idea, have you? How long is a piece of string?

Ms Sugden: It would be remiss of me to say that I have no idea. By all means, the building work will start when we can secure capital funding. If that were to happen soon, for example, I would expect a fully developed prison to be delivered by 2025-26.

Mr Mullan: Minister, you will be aware that there is a great need for a new build for Magilligan prison, which would benefit not only the prisoners and the staff but the local construction industry and would be a valuable asset to the local economy in general. Given that the business case has already been approved by the Department of Finance, do you agree that the project is shovel-ready? What assurances can you give that you will be knocking on the door of the Finance Minister's office to ensure that additional capital funding will be sought for this development?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his questions. He can be assured that I, more than anyone, am quite keen to see this build go ahead. Indeed, you referred to the approved business case that will go forward when capital funding is secured. I agree with the comments about the manufacturing industry; this is a very significant project. It is important to note that this is also an invest-to-save project. When we finally get a fully developed prison, we will see savings. It will also make it safer for prison staff to carry out the rehabilitation programmes that we talked about earlier. I am committed to ensuring that we move forward on the project when capital investment is secured.

2.15 pm

Ms Archibald: I thank the Minister for her answers. Will she outline what arrangements will be made through the project to accommodate the needs of prisoners with mental health issues, autism and ADHD?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. Earlier in Question Time, we had a conversation around mental health. You also referred to ADHD and autism, which need to be considered for people coming into the criminal justice system. We are at the very early stages of trying

to understand what that looks like for the Prison Service. If it forms part of our modernisation programme for prison officers and there are opportunities for them to develop and to understand prisoners' needs better in those areas, we will look at that. The opportunity that we have now is to look at how we move forward in understanding better the needs of prisoners and prison officers.

Mr Ford: A few years ago, the then Minister of Finance and Personnel praised the Prison Service for its work in planning capital build, not just for Magilligan but for Maghaberry and the women's facility at Hydebank. I congratulate the Minister on having cut the first sod for a new building at Maghaberry. Even if she has no news on Magilligan, does she have any news on the women's facility at Hydebank?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. As he will be fully informed of, the new build at Magilligan is part of a wider redevelopment process, the first phase of which is the redevelopment at Magilligan. I look forward to cutting the first sod on that, which, hopefully, will be very soon, but it is subject to capital investment. After that, we can proceed with plans in other areas.

Domestic Violence: Court Listings

4. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department plans to extend the implementation of the Magistrates' Court pilot scheme, launched in November 2011, which provided for special listing arrangements for domestic violence cases. (AQO 268/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Tackling domestic and sexual violence and abuse is a key priority for me as Justice Minister. I am committed to ensuring that victims who are encouraged to engage with the criminal justice system are provided with effective protection and support, and that perpetrators are held to account. I believe that there is a desire across the Executive to address the issue, as evidenced not only by the all-party group on domestic violence but by the support of the Justice Committee, and I look forward to working with colleagues as we move forward on that.

I commend the approach in Derry of delivering special listing arrangements for domestic violence cases. The arrangements, which were introduced by District Judge McElholm in 2011, ensure that domestic violence cases are clustered and heard by him on specifically designated days. Relevant agencies, including the support services, concentrate their efforts and resources into those days in order to provide moral and practical support to victims.

An evaluation of the scheme, undertaken in 2014, indicated that the arrangement makes a tangible difference to victims of domestic violence and abuse who have to face what is often a daunting and overwhelming journey through the criminal justice process. Some improvements to support services available to victims were identified, and, in March this year, my predecessor announced that the arrangements should be enhanced before further consideration is given to rolling out the model across other areas of Northern Ireland.

The Londonderry listing arrangement also formed part of the study undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in June 2015 as part of the public governance review. Its report heralds the success of the domestic violence listing arrangement

and recommends the inclusion of a judicially supervised pilot programme for perpetrators. Rigorous monitoring and evaluation will provide insight into the added value of judicial oversight as part of the domestic violence listing arrangement and inform future decisions on the most effective model for dealing with domestic violence cases in the court system.

My Department is, therefore, taking the necessary steps to enhance the existing domestic violence listing arrangement through the introduction of a pilot court-supervised perpetrator programme. In my role as Justice Minister, I have already met Lord Chief Justice Sir Declan Morgan, and I will continue to engage with him and other stakeholders as I look to the future of this specific arrangement and in seeking more widely to address domestic and sexual violence and abuse in Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind the Minister of the two-minute rule.

Mr McAleer: I thank the Minister for her extensive answer. Does she believe that domestic violence courts will encourage and empower more victims to take action? If the pilot is rolled out, will her Department be minded to engage in a public awareness campaign on this option being available?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The arrangement in Derry has been very successful. When we look at the new enhancements to that arrangement, we may be minded to see whether it would be appropriate to roll out the scheme across Northern Ireland. I take the Member's point about a wider public awareness programme. To be honest, before becoming Minister, I was not aware of the arrangement in Derry, probably thankfully.

You are right, however. People will be encouraged to come forward to report such offences if they are better supported. It is a challenging thing to stand up in court and give evidence, particularly if you are a victim. It has been seen that there is a reluctance to do so, whereas in a supportive environment we are seeing an increase in the number of people coming forward, and that can only be a good thing.

Lord Morrow: I have been asking questions on the issue as far back as June 2011, when I asked the then Minister two questions. In 2015, I asked him a similar question to the previous ones. I am tempted to ask the Minister the same question again, because the then Minister said then that he noted:

"a positive evaluation of these arrangements has recently been completed which recommends that these measures and initiatives are introduced in other courts. Officials from the Department and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service —" — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 101, pWA71].

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Member to get to his question.

Lord Morrow: Yes. I thought that you would say that. How long will an evaluation of this take? We are now at nearly six years. Do we have to wait another six?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his inference. No, I hope that you do not have to wait another six years. I would like to get the work done a little bit quicker than that.

To be fair to my predecessor, with the pilot arrangement in Derry, there were issues around how we could better support victims that came out of the OECD report. He recommended that we could perhaps further enhance the arrangements under the pilot scheme so that we can see whether it is appropriate to roll it out across Northern Ireland. We are looking at that. As I said, this is my overarching priority for the next five years. If I can go some way towards tackling the issue, we can solve a lot of social and economic problems across Northern Ireland. Therefore, yes, I hope that it will be a lot sooner than six years.

Mrs Palmer: Given the particular effects and coercive nature of domestic violence, can I confirm with the Minister that there are no instances of individuals convicted of domestic violence taking part in the enhanced combination order pilot that was started last October?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question, in which she mentioned coercive control. My Department recently undertook a public consultation that sought views on whether a specific domestic abuse offence to capture patterns of coercive and controlling behaviour should be introduced in law. Although I will want to consult the Justice Committee and enter into wider engagement with the community and voluntary sector, I am minded to move forward on the issue.

Ms Bailey: A recent briefing paper given to me by the Assembly's research team shows that, although the total number of homicides in Northern Ireland has fallen over the past few years, those with a domestic abuse motivation have remained relatively constant, to the point that, whereas in 2008 16.7% of homicide cases were female victims, in 2014 that proportion had risen to just over 41%. It is good to hear the plans to take the issue seriously and to extend the implementation of the courts —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Can we move to a question, please?

Ms Bailey: — but what other initiatives will she be addressing as a matter of absolute urgency for domestic violence victims?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. She mentions domestic homicides. My Department previously explored the issue of domestic homicide reviews by setting up a working group to scope serious case reviews already in place across relevant Departments and agencies and to consider initial options for delivery. It was agreed that further work was required to ensure that a proposed model would be suitable for Northern Ireland and link into a complex context of reviews identified. The DOJ has therefore committed, under the action plan for the new stopping domestic and sexual violence and abuse strategy, to developing an appropriate model to identify lessons learned and improve responses to cases of domestic homicide in Northern Ireland. Work has commenced, and additional resources have been secured to progress the initiative.

To come back to what else we can do, I am very much at the beginning of a five-year mandate, and it is an area that I really do have quite a passion for and am keen to address. A lot of the work that has been done up until now was perhaps already ongoing under my predecessor. However, over the next five years, I will be really keen to engage with the community and voluntary sector on the matter and try to get suggestions from other jurisdictions

to see what we can do. I am open to those suggestions. I know that the Member has a specific interest in this, so if she has any ideas I would be keen to meet and discuss them.

Fatal Foetal Abnormality Working Group

5. **Mr Logan** asked the Minister of Justice how many times the working group on fatal foetal abnormality has met to discuss and produce proposals. (AQO 269/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I understand that the working group on fatal foetal abnormality has met on three occasions and has carried out additional engagement work. The group aims to report to the Health Minister and me by the end of September.

Mr Logan: Does the Minister agree that it is important to have this discussion in an atmosphere of respect and that people do not have their viewpoints misrepresented, as we have seen in the past?

Ms Sugden: Yes, I entirely agree with that point. This is an emotive issue. The Member will not be familiar with this, but we had a very long and quite respectful debate on the issue before the election.

Of course, people need to be heard on the wider issue. The fatal foetal abnormality working group was set up to hear the viewpoint of practitioners and experts in that particular medical field. So, whilst I would not want to presume the recommendations that might come out of that working group next week, I will wait, along with the Health Minister, to see how we can move forward.

Mr Kearney: Minister, have you had any discussions with the Minister of Health in relation to the ongoing promotion of equality and human rights for women, specifically with regard to ensuring that women are not being denied timely and suitable prenatal testing in relation to fatal foetal abnormalities?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that he is fully aware that prenatal care for women in these situations would be fully a matter for the Health Minister. I have worked with the Health Minister on the issue to see how we can progress it, because, whilst the legal aspects of this will fall within my jurisdiction, there is a concern from a health perspective that she should be involved as well.

Mr Aiken: Given the recent resignation of the paediatric pathologist Dr Gannon over the interventions by Northern Ireland's Attorney General on issues surrounding fatal foetal abnormality, does the Justice Minister believe that the Attorney General's beliefs may have interfered with his professional impartiality on the issue, thus rendering his position, based on this judgement, untenable?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. My understanding is that the role of the Attorney General is to provide legal advice to the Northern Ireland Executive, but I imagine that any Minister worth their salt would take a range of views when considering this type of issue. The Attorney General, as the Member knows, is entirely independent, and the decisions he takes are within his gift and his gift only. When I am balancing an issue that affects the people of Northern Ireland, I will consider a wide range of the views that have been put to me, so there will not be an opportunity for one person to influence me.

Ms Bradshaw: Minister, thank you for your answers to date. Can you guarantee that the report from the working group will be published promptly, once the review has concluded, to ensure full transparency?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for her question. The working group will report to the Health Minister and me and will provide a number of recommendations in that area. It will then be up to us to find a way of moving forward, because this will not be a decision for me or the Health Minister alone. Any legislative change, if that is what is recommended, will have to go through the wider Executive.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): A quick question from Mr Allister.

Mr Allister: Can the Minister tell us something about the composition of the working party, and can she assure the House that it is not made up solely of clinicians and other personnel with a predisposed preference for termination as the answer?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The purpose of the working group is to take an expert view on this particular area. So, it is made up of public medical professionals. I do not think that anyone is predisposed on this. The purpose of the exercise is to be entirely informed on the issue in the most appropriate way.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): That ends the period for listed questions. We move on to topical questions.

2.30 pm

Lord Chief Justice's Proposals

T1. **Mr Beattie** asked the Minister of Justice for her opinion of the Lord Chief Justice's proposal for the judicial system to become a non-ministerial department, which she heard earlier this month when she attended his speech to open the new legal year. (AQT 196/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. Yes, I am familiar with the Lord Chief Justice's wishes around the non-ministerial department. We are working quite closely with the Lord Chief Justice to try to understand the advantages and disadvantages of what he is asking for. I respect entirely the independence of the judiciary, but sometimes you need to be careful what you wish for. By all means, if the Lord Chief Justice is keen to take this off my hands and he knows the repercussions of doing so, I am quite happy to look at that. It is not something that I am particularly against.

Mr Beattie: I thank the Minister for her answer. Have you actually engaged with the judicial executive group that the Lord Chief Justice has set up to promote the idea of a non-ministerial department and which he sees as a conduit for work between the various different justice departments?

Ms Sugden: I have not engaged specifically with that group, but I have regular meetings with the Lord Chief Justice, and it is an issue that he has raised with me. The thinking around it seems to be very much at the early stages. I am quite happy to have discussions with the Lord Chief Justice and the group, if that is how he wishes us to move forward and if that is the most appropriate thing to do.

Online Sexual Abuse: Legislation

T2. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the adequacy of our legislation to deal with online sexual abuse. (AQT 197/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. This is a very topical issue, particularly given recent news reports. Widely, we do not seem to have an entire focus on the pitfalls of the Internet and what it can be used to do, from an abuse point of view most critically but also through cybercrime against businesses and all of that. I recently met an Organised Crime Task Force group, and the pitfalls of the Internet and how it can be used to exploit children, and also people generally through financial fraud and various issues, was raised with me. I am keen to put a focus on that, because I think that we in Northern Ireland are behind in our thinking on the dangers of the Internet. When we get to a point where we feel comfortable, we will probably be behind again. It is something that we need to have a keen eye on as soon as possible.

Mr Bell: I thank the Minister for that level of focus and attention. Does she agree with me that the trends are very worrying indeed? According to the NSPCC, across the UK, there has been a 21% rise in calls to Childline concerning online sexual abuse, and, in Northern Ireland, there were 160 such calls last year. Does she agree that that indicates that we need to keep a watching brief on this?

Ms Sugden: Yes, of course, I agree entirely. This is a very worrying trend. It seems that people are using the Internet to commit crime in a very different way than before and so that it is almost hidden. It is completely worrying that they are using it to manipulate our children, and, again, we need to be entirely mindful of that. Parents need to be mindful of it, but there needs to be wider education around how young people use the Internet. It not just young people. Older people of all ages are targeted by these types of perpetrators online. The Member raises a very important point, and it is something that we will be looking at in the Department.

Prison Service: Welfare Issues

T3. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline her proposals to deal with the many welfare issues affecting the Northern Ireland Prison Service, including the serious increase in mental health issues amongst officers. (AQT 198/16-21)

Ms Sugden: We are at the very early stages of our thinking on how we deal with welfare issues, particularly mental health, relating to prison officers. Earlier in Question Time, the focus was on the mental health issues of prisoners, but the Member rightly points to the mental health issues of prison officers. As I said earlier, working in the prison environment is like no other. It is isolated and challenging. We need to pay due regard to the impact of that on officers. We are looking at a modernisation programme, as I mentioned earlier, that will look at how we can better support officers. I am mindful that, if we are to look after prisoners in these establishments, that starts with looking after our prison officers. I appreciate the question, and it is something that we are keen to do. Again, however, I am happy to take Members' thoughts and perhaps hear about their interactions with various people to inform me on this.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for her answer. She confirmed, in reply to an earlier question, that she will work with the Health Minister on the issue of prisoners. Has she worked with the Health Minister on the issue of prison officers? What practical steps are in the pipeline to help prison officers?

Ms Sugden: It is very early stages, but I am minded to look at the patterns that officers are working — we have an awful lot more female prison officers — and how that impacts on their family life and also at their general conversations and engagement with hierarchy in the Prison Service. There is now an opportunity with the new director general, whoever he or she may be, to implement that change and shift in mindset and think about how we can better support our prison officers.

Prisoner Ombudsman's Recommendations

T4. **Mr Kelly** asked the Minister of Justice to assure the Assembly that she will, without delay, implement the 63 recommendations made by the Prisoner Ombudsman in the aftermath of the life-changing injuries to Sean Lynch. (AQT 199/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. As I said to Mr Attwood during Question Time, the report makes for very difficult reading, and I am very sorry that this happened to this young man. He has been left with life-changing injuries, as you said, and we need to look at the processes. From our perspective, the Prisoner Ombudsman's report has put forward 63 recommendations, which fall not only within my remit but within that of the South Eastern Trust. We need to see how we can best utilise them so that we do not have a circumstance like this again.

Mr Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for the answer up to now. If I may persist, if a number of those recommendations affect the Justice Department, will she come back to the Assembly and tell us about them? Has she spoken to the family? Have the authorities apologised to the young man for injuries that took place over a full hour in view of watching prison officers?

Ms Sugden: No, I have not met the family of the man, but I am quite happy to do so if they wish to get in touch with the Department. Indeed, my director general said that she was happy to meet the family as well. For me, what is concerning about this, Mr Kelly, is the fact that I do not believe that my officers were equipped to deal with this very serious case that involved mental health problems, and we need to look at that. Thankfully, this will not present itself very often, but the fact that it did is an issue for me and something that I am keen to look at.

Dissident Republicans: Judicial Leniency

T5. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Justice whether she is aware that, although we all recognise the judiciary as an independent body, free from political interference, a belief exists in the unionist community that leniency has been shown to dissident republicans, and, if she is aware, to state what she can do to reassure the unionist community. (AQT 200/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his question. The public perception of this is quite worrying. Indeed, knowing

a lot of information about this issue, I do not believe that it is as biased as some suggest. You highlighted the independence of the judiciary, and I am keen always to respect that. I have a good close working relationship with the Lord Chief Justice, and, if this is a public perception issue, I am happy to share those concerns with him on behalf of the Assembly.

Mr Frew: I thank the Minister for her answer. Nearly every week in the press we see stories about changes to bail conditions, lenient bail conditions and suspended sentencing compared to others in the unionist community.

Has the Minister conducted any sort of survey or investigation of sentencing of late? Would that be something that she could take on in order to reassure the public?

Ms Sugden: I thank the Member for his supplementary question. Again, I will be careful not to step on the toes of the judiciary in this area. We announced a sentencing review just before the summer recess that will hopefully address some of those issues. Taking on board the comments from Members in the House, I am keen to raise this as an issue with the Lord Chief Justice and see how he can best take it forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Mr Storey is not in his place.

Bangor Courthouse: Future Use

T7. **Mr Chambers** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the future use of the now redundant courthouse in Bangor. (AQT 202/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As the Member will be aware, the courthouses are pending court decisions. On that basis, it would be inappropriate for me to make a remark at this stage.

Mr Chambers: Is the Minister able to share with me whether she has been approached by any local groups about its future use and whether she is sympathetic to those approaches?

Ms Sugden: Stakeholders concerned about all the courthouses across Northern Ireland have approached me with their concerns about the court estate. Pending the outcome of the court case, it is difficult for me to say anything at this stage. What I will say is that I encourage everyone to have an input into this. These are buildings in towns in your constituencies. By all means, if there is an input or a better way to utilise them, I am keen to hear that — after the outcome of the court case, of course.

Prisoners: Mental Health Needs

T8. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Justice whether she is satisfied that suitable care policies and procedures are in place to support prisoners with special mental health needs. (AQT 203/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Coming back to the area of mental health, I am not sure, to be honest, that there are. I refer the comments that I made to Mr Kelly earlier and, equally, I do not think that prison officers are equipped to deal with certain issues of mental health cases that present themselves in prisons. They do, of course, have training in the area, but, as mental health cases in prisons become more prevalent, we need to review that and look at the training and the care needs. That is certainly something that I am minded to do within the next five years.

Mr McAleer: Is the Minister saying that she is minded to look at the training for prison staff to deal with the complex needs of many prisoners?

Ms Sugden: Yes, of course. There are kind of two strands to it. It is about better supporting prison officers so that they are able to do the job and feel equipped to deal with situations as they arise, but it is also about coming back to look at the needs of people in custody and whether we are best serving them.

Mental health is a shared responsibility between me and the Health Minister, and we have already had conversations about how we can move forward on this. Our working relationship has been positive, because there is a keenness to address this, not just within prison institutions but across the wider criminal justice system. It concerns me that a lot of people who come into the criminal justice system seem to present with some sort of mental health issue. That can derive from other traumas or impacts that they have had in their life, including domestic violence, which is one of the reasons why I am keen to address it particularly. Everything goes hand in hand, and I think that we can make really effective progress if we can have a cross-departmental approach on it. The work has already begun.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Mr Andy Allen is not in his place.

Paramilitary Activity Action Plan

T10. **Mr Ford** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on what is happening in her Department in relation to the action plan mentioned earlier by Nichola Mallon, which was produced by the Executive in response to the panel report on paramilitary activity that was published at the end of May, albeit that some of us felt that the so-called action plan fell some way short of an action plan in its targets, detailing of responsibilities and finance. (AQT 205/16-21)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I ask the Minister to provide a brief answer.

Ms Sugden: Sure. As I said at the time when the criticism came, to expect any more or to expect a fully costed and detailed plan at that stage in the limited period that we had would have been irresponsible. We are moving ahead with it, and we have a design day to see how we can get into the detail. Work is ongoing, and I am sure that we will have outcomes from that in the very near future.

2.45 pm

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Question 11 has been withdrawn.

Environmental Legislation

1. **Mr Butler** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what proportion of environmental legislation in Northern Ireland derives from the European Union. (AQO 280/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): It is difficult to give a precise answer on the proportion of environmental legislation that is derived from the European Union, given that it varies significantly in both scale and scope. Therefore, simple numeric figures are not necessarily helpful in this case.

Most of our key environmental legislation is EU-derived, in that it comes from far-reaching directives such as the waste framework directive and the water framework directive. However, some of our environmental legislation is UK Government-derived; for example, the Climate Change Act 2008. In addition, Northern Ireland has itself led the way — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. Please continue, Minister.

Miss McIlveen: In addition, Northern Ireland has itself led the way with its own environmental legislation through initiatives such as the carrier bag levy in advance of developments elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The position is further complicated by the fact that environmental requirements are also contained in other legislation, such as that relating to agriculture and fisheries.

Whatever the post-Brexit scenario, I remain committed to environmental protection. However, I am also sure that I want to consider whether there are opportunities for Northern Ireland to do this in different ways that are not burdensome on society and the business community, particularly the agrifood sector.

Mr Butler: I thank the Minister for her answer. I am somewhat disappointed that there was no numerical data in the answer, given that it was used in the Brexit debate. Can the Minister confirm that the environmental protection currently provided by the birds and habitats directives will either remain the same or be improved on following Brexit?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As I said, I am committed to environmental protection regardless of where we are coming out of the debate. It is a priority for me, whether in the environment, agriculture and fishery sectors or in rural communities. I will look for the best deal for Northern Ireland and apply whatever legislation we feel is appropriate.

Mr Poots: Does the Minister recognise that over 2,700 regulations have been imposed on the agricultural community in carrying out its duties by the European Union? That is around one for every week that we have been in the European Union. Post-Brexit, can we look at having an enablement culture for the production of food, as opposed to the regulatory one that currently exists?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. None of us yet knows the outcome of the exit negotiations or the necessary standards that will be applied to trade. It is vital that any future trade agreements allow us to retain our current export markets and to develop additional agreements with countries outside the EU, while applying the necessary regulation. There will be opportunities as we move forward, and we need to be mindful of those and take advantage of them as they present themselves.

Ms Archibald: Will the Minister outline any discussions that she has had with stakeholders about the potential impact on environmental legislation in the North following the referendum result?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. As I said, I am focused on getting a good deal for Northern Ireland, be that for our rural communities, farmers, fishermen or the environment. As the Member will be aware, I have established, alongside my colleague Minister Hamilton, a consultative committee, and the Northern Ireland Environment Link is a member. I have also met a number of groups individually and will continue to do so as we move through the process. She may also be aware that I met environmental NGOs on 7 September. We had a positive discussion. Obviously, there are opportunities and challenges ahead, and I gave them a commitment that my officials and I would engage with them as we move through this.

Farm Business Improvement Scheme

2. **Mr McKee** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the business investment scheme. (AQO 281/16-21)

5. **Mr Irwin** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the farm business improvement scheme. (AQO 284/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 5 together.

The farm business improvement scheme is a package of measures aimed at improving the competitiveness and sustainability of our farming sector. This package of measures is being rolled out in a phased way. The first phase of the farm business improvement scheme is under way, with the business development groups and farm family key skills training providing advice and support to help farmers to clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business.

The next phase will be the capital scheme, which will offer tiered grant support linked to the needs in the farmer's business plan. I am pleased to have launched the preparation stage for the capital scheme earlier today. Its purpose is to provide information to farmers to allow potential applicants to start to prepare in advance of the scheme opening formally next month.

Mr McKee: The Minister will probably be aware that frustration has been building amongst the farming community because of what it sees as typically excessive delays in bringing forward the scheme. Instead of having farmers rely on rumour and speculation, will the Minister publish without delay the list of eligible items for both tranches of the scheme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I understand and, indeed, share his frustration about that scheme and others that I felt should have been opened much earlier than they were. As I said, I launched the preparation stage today. It provides some basic information about the capital scheme to help farmers to start thinking about what they need to do if they are interested in applying for the grant scheme. It will also allow time for farmers to ensure they have a category 1 farm business identification number before the scheme opens. If you have seen the press release, you will notice I am also encouraging farmers to consider using the Making it Safer health and safety tool that is available.

Farmers have been aware that this has been coming. There have been lengthy discussions with the industry

about what the scheme would look like. There have also been discussions with banks in advance of that. The business discussion groups have been meeting and making farmers who are interested ready in advance of this happening. I am not taking away from the fact that there was frustration about the length of time it has taken, but we are now at the stage of it being opened.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr William Irwin.

Mr Irwin: Question number 5.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): The Minister grouped questions 2 and 5. This is for a supplementary.

Mr Irwin: I am sorry. Will the Minister explain whether the recent Treasury statement will have any impact on the scheme?

Miss McIlveen: Not on this scheme. We are working through the funding of it. The scheme is opening for applications in October, so there is no issue with that.

Mr Kearney: I thank the Minister for the detail she provided to date. Will you, Minister, provide an update on the agri-food processing investment scheme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. There is a considerable amount of interest in the successor to the processing and marketing grant scheme. The proposed scheme will help to promote the economic performance and competitiveness of the agrifood sector through capital investment and the processing, marketing and/or development of agricultural products. I am working very closely with my colleague Minister Hamilton in the Department for the Economy, along with Invest NI, to develop what will be the best scheme to fit the needs of our local processing sector. That will be very much subject to approvals and funding. If all goes to plan, I hope to be able to launch the scheme towards the end of the year.

Ms Armstrong: What is being done to identify and proactively promote the business investment scheme to farms that could be in need of diversification but have so far not engaged?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Obviously, this has been trailed for quite a considerable length of time. Work has been done through the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise and the advisers to encourage maximum uptake of the scheme. Of course, the scheme will not work for everyone, but I want to encourage as many people as possible. This will be the first phase of the scheme. At the end of this first phase, we will review how well the scheme has been taken up and perhaps look at further opportunities to encourage others to get involved in the next phase, subject to finance for a further scheme.

Brexit: Rural Economy

3. **Ms Mallon** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the impact of leaving the European Union on the rural economy. (AQO 282/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A full assessment will depend on the new arrangements that will be put in place and on how well we can exploit the opportunities that leaving the European Union will present. Certainly, the early impacts of Brexit have been beneficial. The fall in exchange rates has increased the expected value of the basic payment for

this year. Farm-gate prices have also improved, partly as a result of exchange rate movements. Sheep prices, for example, have improved by 28% since this time last year. This is encouraging. We can say that the early impact of the vote to leave has been positive for agriculture.

The longer-term impacts remain to be seen. I intend to do all that I can to protect and promote the interests of the Northern Ireland agrifood sector in the forthcoming negotiations. I have already held a series of meetings with Ministers from the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations, as well as with rural stakeholders, to consider the potential implications of Brexit. The meetings included discussions on the need to ensure that future trade and policy frameworks take account of the importance of Northern Ireland's agrifood and fishing industries, rural communities and the environment sector.

I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agriculture, environmental, fisheries and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that will come from leaving the European Union.

Ms Mallon: I thank the Minister for her response. In addition to the meetings and discussions that she outlined, what engagement is she having with people in rural communities who will be directly affected by the impact of any potential Brexit?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Throughout the summer months, I was very busy, even though we were in recess. I went around the rural shows, and I met and spoke to farmers. I went to each of the ports and harbours — to Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie — and met processors and producers. I feel that I had quite productive conversations throughout and used my time productively. I have a sense of where they are. Some are very positive about where we are as a result of the vote — of course, many voted to leave the European Union. We are aware that there are challenges ahead, but they also see the opportunities. As you will have heard in previous answers, I have also met stakeholders from the environment sector and other rural community representative groups.

Mrs Barton: Minister, before the referendum, you suggested that farmers would not be left financially worse off in the event of a Brexit vote. Do you still believe this, especially for the years after 2020?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. She will be aware that we did not know what the situation would be post-2020 in the European Union, and that in itself was causing anxiety. There was a considerable vote by farmers, fishermen and others to leave the European Union, despite what you perhaps perceive to be the comfort of the money that was coming to the industry. There are opportunities to be had. Very difficult discussions also have to be had, and we will be in a much clearer place as we move through those.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister agree that one of the greatest opportunities for growth after Brexit lies in the fishing sector, which has been mercilessly destroyed under the common fisheries policy? In preparation for our liberation from that, is there active work in hand to plot out a way forward for the growth of the fishing industry and its re-establishment as one of the key cornerstones of our economy?

3.00 pm

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I agree that there are great opportunities. When you speak to the fishermen, they are clear about what those are, but they are also mindful of the complexities around fishing and how fishing waters are going to be mapped out in negotiations. I had conversations with Minister Eustice in advance of the AGRIFISH Council meeting in July, and I hope to continue those. There are ongoing conversations between my Department and DEFRA. I have given my commitment to those in the producers' organisations to meet them regularly in order to get a real sense of where they feel we need to go as we move forward with the process of exiting the European Union.

Ms Dillon: The Minister's engagement with stakeholders was very different from mine when it comes to how they feel about Brexit, and I think that we met many of the same stakeholders, including farmers' organisations. What assurances can the Minister give about the future funding of the rural development programme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. We continue to move forward with our plans for the rural development programme. Those include opening the capital element of the farm business improvement scheme, which I already outlined; operation of the business discussion groups; farm family key skills; and the roll-out of the LEADER programme. The multimillion-pound environmental farming scheme is an important part of our agriculture agenda. I am working hard to ensure that it is opened up for applications in February.

Mr Stalford: Does the Minister recall this policy document, endorsed by the people, which is the DUP manifesto? In it, we stated that we wanted a Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, not an EU police force. Does she agree that it will be a source of great joy for farmers, fishermen and the agrifood sector that they will no longer be subjected to the burdensome and cumbersome regulations emanating from the European Union bureaucracy?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Who am I to disagree with him?

Spartina Cordgrass

4. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the powers her Department has to control spartina cordgrass in the coastal areas of County Down. (AQO 283/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Common cordgrass — *Spartina anglica* — is a highly invasive species that causes extensive ecological damage to intertidal habitats, outcompeting and replacing native eelgrass, on which the light-bellied brent goose, a high-priority species for conservation action here, depends.

The Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985, as amended by the Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, contains powers for controlling the introduction of invasive alien species in the wider environment. It is an offence to cause to grow in the wild any non-native plant listed under schedule 9 to the order, and spartina is listed in Part II of schedule 9. The Department does not, however, have any statutory powers to compel an owner or occupier of premises or land to control invasive alien

species introduced prior to the 1985 order, nor does it have the power to take control measures without the consent of an owner or occupier, but, in the context of our national responsibility to manage our specially protected sites, the Department has worked with a range of stakeholders and landowners in coastal areas to control spartina.

Mr Wells: I note that the Minister is quoting from legislation that was drafted before she was born, but I was in the Assembly in 1985 when that article on spartina was drafted and implemented. She outlined why it is illegal to import spartina, but can her Department give grant aid to landowners who wish to take their own action — for instance, the National Trust in the case of Strangford lough or the Commissioners of Irish Lights in the case of Carlingford lough — in order to encourage private landowners to eradicate this invasive and damaging species?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, flattery will get you everywhere: I wish I had been born after 1985.

I am happy to come back to the Member on the issues that he has raised. My Department has undertaken work on several coastal sites, including Strangford lough and others in County Down. There is a spartina control group, which comprises members from the Department, NGOs, stakeholders and landowners. It was set up in 2010 to implement a spartina management strategy. The aim of the strategy is to manage spartina by preventing its spread and, where feasible, significantly reducing the areas of common cordgrass. Various programmes are being carried out by that group, with spraying on the areas targeted. There is a planning meeting every April to discuss this. The Department coordinates the functions of the group, and I am certainly content to speak to the Member if he feels that we can do anything further with regard to this.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her briefing on what the Department is doing on spartina; I admit that I had never heard tell of it before. Will she put the same effort into and emphasis on the eradication and tackling of giant hogweed?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, we had a debate earlier today on Japanese knotweed, and giant hogweed invaded that discussion as well. I am happy to look at all of the issues. I gave a commitment in the Chamber earlier that we would look again at invasive species, and, as I said to the Member after that debate, I am content to meet him to discuss what he sees to be the issues and the possible remedy.

Farmers: Cash Flow Difficulties

6. **Mr Bell** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how she plans to alleviate cash flow difficulties for farmers. (AQO 285/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am committed to supporting Northern Ireland farmers and to helping build a strong, sustainable and resilient local agrifood industry. I recently announced that, this year, Northern Ireland will be the first region in the United Kingdom to make advance payments from mid-October. I have had one-to-one engagement with banks, and I have met feed merchants to encourage them to be flexible and supportive in dealing with farmers. I have pressed both DEFRA and the European Commission for

meaningful support for our farmers, including at the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council (AGRIFISH) on 18 July. Members will be aware of the €500 million farm support package that was announced at that meeting.

Our dairy farmers can now apply for compensation to voluntarily reduce their milk supply under the €150 million EU aid scheme, should that suit their particular business needs. I have successfully made the case for a significant share of the €30 million UK envelope of EU exceptional adjustment aid, and indications are that Northern Ireland will receive €4.8 million. I am considering the options for how best to use that funding and will announce details of that at the earliest opportunity.

Looking to the future, my Department will continue to help strengthen the sector through a range of support, including the rural development programme. In particular, the farm business improvement scheme will help ensure that farmers are better equipped to meet challenges and take advantage of future market opportunities. I am delighted that the preparation stage for the capital scheme began today, and the scheme will open for applications in October.

Mr Bell: I thank the Minister. I am sure that I am not alone in thanking her for what is a very impressive and comprehensive range of work undertaken to date. Can the Minister give us her assessment of any signs of improvement in market conditions? Indeed, can we agree today in the House to send a message that we call on the processors to ensure the maximum return in value to the farmers?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question, and I agree with him on his latter comment. I am aware of the challenging market conditions that farmers face and have faced over the last 18 to 24 months, particularly with the severe and prolonged fall in milk prices. While the factors contributing to the low prices are essentially outside DAERA's control, my Department will continue to do what it can to assist farmers at this time and help them cope with future market volatility. I am pleased that we are beginning to see signs of improvement in prices. Farmers in a number of sectors appear to be benefiting from recent changes in the sterling/euro exchange rates and the recent results from the Fonterra auction are also encouraging. As I said in a previous answer, there have been increases in beef, sheep, pig and dairy prices over the last three months, and that is positive and to be welcomed. We will continue to make the most of the measures to build the resilience, efficiency and competitiveness of the industry through the new rural development programme.

Mr Milne: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she tell us if she has any plans to meet the banks regarding concerns raised by the farming organisations about banks taking their share of payments from farmers with no regard or consideration that they have other bills to pay to merchants etc?

Miss McIlveen: As I said earlier, I have had a busy summer and I met, individually, with representatives from the Danske Bank, Ulster Bank, Bank of Ireland, First Trust, Barclays and HSBC. I am assured by the work they are doing to support the industry, but I will keep in regular contact with them.

I also had the opportunity to meet feed merchants to get a better understanding of the issues for them. The priority has to be assisting with cash flow for farmers, and I have tried to put in as many measures as I can in the short time

that I have been in office. I am conscious of the challenges and have pledged to have an open-door policy regarding all these things, and I will continue to have conversations as we move forward.

Ms S Bradley: What conversations has the Minister had around the Executive table on the issue of farmers accessing funds with, in particular, the Economy and Finance Ministers?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Obviously, the Executive take all this very seriously. As you would expect, I have met the Economy Minister on a number of occasions. I share a constituency office with him, so it is not terribly difficult to have those conversations. We had an initial meeting with the agrifood sector a couple of days following the referendum result, and that has now been formalised with our consultative group, which met last week. Around that table there are representatives of all sectors in agrifood, fisheries and the environment. I also had the opportunity to meet the Finance Minister, and there are obviously concerns around finance moving forward. All those conversations will continue, and I will maximise whatever influence I have, where I can do so.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Declan McAleer, although I warn him that there may not be time for a supplementary question.

Environmental Farming Scheme

7. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs when the environmental farming scheme will commence. (AQO 286/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A number of schemes, including the environmental farming scheme (EFS), are being developed in parallel by my Department. The aim is to implement them in line with business priorities as soon as possible. I plan to open the EFS in February 2017. However, two key steps that are needed to achieve that are business case approval and clarity on funding post-Brexit. A well-funded and targeted EFS has to be an important part of our domestic agricultural agenda. Therefore, I will work hard to secure that outcome.

The EFS will be targeted to deliver maximum environmental benefit and has been designed to be straightforward for farmers, taking account of experience with previous schemes. The EFS has three levels. The higher level is primarily for environmentally designated sites. The wider level will deliver benefits across the wider countryside, and the group level is to support cooperative action by farmers in specific areas such as a river catchment. The EFS will offer participants a five-year agreement to deliver a range of environmental measures primarily relating to biodiversity and water quality. A programme of awareness-raising sessions will take place prior to the scheme opening to provide farmers with full details of the EFS.

Last month, the Treasury announced that it would underwrite EU funding, provided that it is committed before the Chancellor's autumn statement. Whilst funding for the EFS is not covered by that recent Treasury announcement, we are very focused on securing funding and implementing the scheme.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Thank you. That ends the period for listed questions. We now move on to topical questions.

3.15 pm

Animal Cruelty: Sentencing

T1. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she agrees that some sentences handed down for barbaric acts of animal cruelty not only fall far short of the maximum available but represent a failure to make the progress that might reasonably have been expected under the 2011 Welfare of Animals Act. (AQT 206/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. As an animal lover and someone who was brought up with animals, I am very conscious of and sensitive to animal welfare. Where there are opportunities to strengthen or review legislation, I am open to having those conversations.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister for her answer. It is not a question of strengthening or changing legislation; it is the application of the legislation by the courts. I hope to meet the public prosecutor soon to reflect the animal-loving public's displeasure at scenes such as those found guilty of barbaric acts walking free from court, laughing and jeering at the police and the public. Will the Minister commit to meeting her colleague, the Minister of Justice, to see what more could be done to make sure that sentencing reflects the animal-loving public's sense of justice?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. I absolutely would be up for a meeting with the Minister of Justice about the issue.

Independent Environmental Protection Agency

T2. **Mr E McCann** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether, in view of the recent disastrous fish kill in the River Faughan, apparently caused by toxic discharge from agricultural land, and the emergence of the fact that the notorious Mobuoy Road dump is but one of a number of large, illegal dumps in the Maydown/Campsie area of County Derry, she will take steps to establish an independent environmental protection agency that would bring together all the environment-related functions of the various Departments and be equipped with powers to enforce the highest environmental standards and efficient regulatory processes to defend and extend the environmental rights of all the people of Northern Ireland. (AQT 207/16-21)

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Minister, did you get that? [Laughter.]

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. He referred to the fish kill at Faughan, and I have had a discussion with the Loughs Agency about it. It is currently going through the courts or is in the process of going to court.

On Mobuoy, the Member will be aware that there is an ongoing legal case, so it will be difficult to comment without prejudicing the outcome of it. For the Member's information, I visited the Mobuoy site last week to see the scale of the problem for myself. On general waste

offences, I assure the House and the Member that I take environmental crime very seriously. If the Member or any other Member is aware of any type of waste offence, they should notify me, and I will ensure that I look into it.

On the wider point about an independent environment protection agency, I am the Minister for the Environment, and I am determined to make a positive impact on the environment in Northern Ireland. I have no plans to hand those powers to an independent body. However, I was somewhat surprised that a previous Environment Minister, who is now in the Opposition, removed independent board members from the NIEA. The former Minister, who is not in the House, can perhaps explain why he thought it best to do that. I have asked my officials to look at a number of boards with the possibility of adding independent people to them.

Mr E McCann: I thank the Minister for that. The concern that prompted my question arose not simply from Mobuoy Road and the fish kill in the Faughan, which are events that happened in the Foyle constituency.

I was also encouraged to raise the question by the shenanigans at Woodburn forest, where environmental campaigners did not want to see drilling in that splendid area of natural beauty —

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I encourage the Member to come to the question.

Mr E McCann: Yes, I am, sorry. They were confronted, they believe, not only with a large company able to employ vast resources compared to their own, but with a thicket of environmental and planning regulations and with a number of agencies spread over a number of Departments, so that they found it impossible to process their complaint. We want a bit of fairness here so that the environment can be defended against people whose only concern is profit.

Miss McIlveen: I appreciate the Member's concern around all those particular instances. He will be aware that the Department for Infrastructure is looking at how these schemes are taken forward in the future. I want to give the Member some reassurance that I will take all this very seriously, particularly with regard to pollution and environmental waste crime as we move forward.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I remind all Members that these are topical questions, not topical statements.

LEADER Programme

T3. **Mrs Cameron** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the LEADER programme and to state how it can help to create jobs in rural areas of Northern Ireland. (AQT 208/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. Good progress has been made. All the local action groups (LAGs) have now signed and returned their legal contracts to enable them to start delivering LEADER on the ground. The rural business investment scheme has now completed its first call across nine of the 10 LAGs from successful attendees at the funding workshops. Some 229 applications have been received, which is worth around £8 million of grant aid. The first assessment panels have now commenced, and the first four letters of offer have issued, with more due to issue in early September.

Job creation is a major theme under the rural business development investment scheme, and indications from

the applications received in the first funding call are good, showing that there is great potential to create significant numbers of rural jobs. Indeed, I had the pleasure of being able to present letters of offer, which amounted to approximately £180,000 of grant, to three companies in the Causeway coast and glens area to help develop their businesses. I look forward to projects similar to those right across Northern Ireland.

Mrs Cameron: I thank the Minister for her answer and for the information contained in it. Will the Minister ensure that bureaucracy is kept to an absolute minimum with the local action groups, such as GROW South Antrim, so that they can get their letters of offer out to rural groups and businesses?

Miss McIlveen: I assure the Member that everything is being done to ensure that there is an efficient process in place in order to handle the applications that are received. The use of funding workshops and expressions of interest has meant that LAG admin staff are dealing with fewer applications, but they are of a much higher quality. There is now a 90-day turnaround for applications from the date of the close of call until the applicant receives a funding decision. This will help to ensure that businesses receive a decision as quickly as possible. I hope that her local LAG has found this to be beneficial.

Milk Production: EU Bureaucracy

T4. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what she thinks about the production of milk being reduced by the wonderful bureaucratic monster of the European Union. (AQT 209/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The £150 million milk production reduction aid is part of the broader €500 million farming support package. It is to encourage farmers to reduce milk production in order to counter the oversupply situation and help restore prices. Obviously this is a voluntary scheme, and I encourage those who feel that they need to take up the opportunity that it is there to do that. The applications close tomorrow, so there is an opportunity for them to take advantage of the scheme. Milk prices are starting to increase slightly, so that is a decision that each individual farmer will make.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. A package of €350 million is available. What cut will Northern Ireland receive of the package for the exit programme?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. The early indications are that we will be receiving €4.8 million of that package. This is an enhanced allocation in recognition of the extreme difficulties faced by farmers here. I am currently considering the options for how to spend this money effectively. We are required to select at least one activity from a menu of options given to us by the Commission. This will include production reduction beyond that covered by the EU production reduction scheme or not increasing production. On small-scale farming, we could be looking at the application of extensive reduction methods; we could look at the application of environmental and climate friendly production methods; or, finally, the implementation of cooperation projects.

At this time, there is no united view as to how this money should be spent, but I have met a number of stakeholders,

as have my officials, and we are trying to maximise the impact of that money right across the livestock industry. I want to ensure that we get the best value from that money and that it will make a meaningful difference to our industry.

AFBI: DAERA Support

T5. **Mrs Hale** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to give her commitment that her Department will support AFBI, which is a large employer in the Lagan Valley constituency, particularly the research institute at Hillsborough, to ensure that it continues to deliver for the Northern Ireland agrifood sector. (AQT 210/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. For AFBI to be successful is extremely important to my Department. It will bring immeasurable benefits to our local agrifood industry and underpin its sustainable development. Research undertaken by AFBI, including that carried out at Hillsborough, is vital for good policymaking and for driving the technological advances that will underpin the future competitiveness of our industry. In view of this, I am committed to supporting the development of the organisation, as it seeks to consolidate its efforts around a number of core scientific pillars, where it is seeking to establish a critical mass of world-class expertise and form a stable platform from which to exploit external opportunities and grow.

To help AFBI in this new phase of its development, we are currently considering some exciting plans for the AFBI estate, which would see AFBI consolidating onto a much smaller footprint with modern, efficient, leading-edge facilities. I am also supporting the organisation through the creation of an AFBI-directed research fund to encourage AFBI to achieve excellence in science and seize opportunities for longer-term developments in frontier research that enhance scientific capability within DAERA's area of policy interest and support the local agrifood sector.

In summary, I am fully committed to the work of AFBI and the future delivery of science, which is so important to the agrifood sector in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Hale: I am absolutely delighted that the Minister is committed to the site at Hillsborough and to AFBI. Can she outline any plans that there may be to increase the number of people employed at the Hillsborough site?

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for her question. There is a master plan for the farm buildings at the AFBI Hillsborough site. It is envisaged that a consolidation and replacement modernisation programme will be taken forward out to 2020. This will be undertaken in conjunction with the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) to ensure that there is a holistic approach to the development of DAERA's farming platform. Such an investment recognises that research is vital for good policymaking and for driving forward the advances that we need.

With regards to AFBI's headquarter location, it is recognised that the current premises at Newforge Lane are excessively large and are inefficient and expensive to operate. There is potential for AFBI to move off-site onto a smaller purpose-built facility elsewhere on the estate. Work is ongoing, to the point that the best way forward is to include the option of moving to the Hillsborough site. I

am happy to provide further information and updates on the AFBI estate strategy as we move forward on it.

(Madam Principal Deputy Speaker
[Ms Ruane] in the Chair)

3.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): I call Mr Paul Frew for a quick question, but there will probably not be time for a supplementary.

Going for Growth: Update

T6. **Mr Frew** asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on Going for Growth. (AQT 211/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I thank the Member for his question. Obviously, Going for Growth is central to the achievement of my vision and that of others for a thriving and sustainable economy. Going for Growth outlined a number of recommendations. Good progress has been made to date. We have secured access to 49 new markets and funding approval for the first phase of the farm business improvement scheme. The knowledge transfer element is well under way, with almost 3,000 farmers enrolled in over 150 business development groups, and farm family key skills programmes are now open. I launched the preparatory stage of the FBIS capital scheme today, and the scheme will again open for applications — I said this earlier on a number of occasions — in October. Work on a sustainable land management strategy is also well advanced, and I hope to receive a report from the expert working group in the very near future.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy): Order. That completes Question Time. I ask Members to take their ease while we make changes at the Table.

Private Members' Business

Road Maintenance Budget Deficit

Debate resumed on amendment to motion:

That this Assembly is concerned that the road structural maintenance budget deficit is currently estimated to be £1 billion; notes the importance of road maintenance to road safety, especially in rural areas; further notes that it is estimated that over £137 million per annum is needed to adequately maintain, in its current state, the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to include a ring-fenced allocation to his Department's baseline budget for road maintenance repair that will facilitate a more strategic and, consequently, efficient approach to road maintenance. — [Mr Mullan.]

Which amendment was:

Leave out all after "Infrastructure" and insert

"to develop and publish a costed strategic plan for road maintenance and repair that will be included as part of the Department for Infrastructure's ongoing work programme from 2017-18 until the end of the mandate." — [Ms Armstrong.]

Mr Robinson: There is no question that Northern Ireland's roads could do with additional funding. Many roads require updating or repairs, and there are some that need to be upgraded or made into a dual carriageway. The major difficulty faced in achieving all that is required is finance. I welcome the motion's call for the ring-fencing and allocation of our budget for road maintenance, but I must point out that that is already the case. The amendment calls for the development and publishing of a costed plan, and we already do that, so I have no problem accepting those two items.

In achieving road maintenance and new-build roads, there is the common problem of finance. I hope the SDLP and Alliance Party appreciate that there is not a bottomless pot of money for any Department. That creates a huge problem with reaching the aims stated in the motion and the amendment. I ask both parties what Departments' budgets they wish to see cut to achieve their aims. Is it Health, Education or Agriculture? Both parties appreciate fully that the Executive have to live within the block grant settlement. All of us wish to see more money for Northern Ireland, but I think it would be difficult to convince the Chancellor, Mr Hammond, to part with additional funding.

I welcome the rural roads initiative and the £10 million that is allocated to it. Rural roads are essential links for farmers, rural dwellers and others for going to work or delivering their produce to market or buyers. They have a pivotal role to play in Northern Ireland's economy, and it is only right that specific attention is paid to maintaining them. We must remember that a properly maintained road network helps to reduce potential fatalities or serious injuries on our roads. The backlog is reportedly £1 billion, and maybe the Finance Minister could request additional targeted funding from the Chancellor to help address that. Extra money would be welcome for road maintenance.

In conclusion, there is much to be done. It is a difficult balancing act to deliver maintenance and new road projects, and the key is finance. However, until more money is available, we must, unfortunately, live within budget.

Mr F McCann: I support the motion as amended. Whilst I understand the thrust and sentiment of the motion — it is obviously something we all see as essential — the fact remains that there have been serious reductions in the budget that are outside the control of the Minister and that lie at the door of the British Government and their policy of austerity. I do not think that there is anyone in the House who is not concerned about the year-on-year reduction in budgets. As the motion says, the Department requires an estimated £137 million per annum to adequately maintain the road network in its current state. I agree that the structural integrity of roads across the North is essential for the economy and for the communities that use the roads and streets. I believe that we need to prioritise how that is done. Parties do not have to agree on how the Department's budget is allocated, but we can agree that there are key priorities in the Department, and road maintenance is way up there.

I do not think that there is anyone in the House who does not agree that, if the resources were available to the Executive and the Minister, investment in our roads would be prioritised. The Minister's statement on 28 June recognised that by allocating an additional £10 million package that will target 1,000 roads. He said:

"The improvements will target around 1,000 rural roads".

This, he said, would help:

"stop deterioration and repair severe defects on the local road network."

The Minister also showed his intent by saying that, during this period of financial constraint, we need to prioritise meagre resources, and that it is essential that we keep on top of urgent repairs. He went on to say:

"for too long rural communities have dropped down the priority list. Today will go some way to addressing that imbalance and giving rural communities across the region roads that are fit for purpose and that will stand the test of time".

On 27 June, he announced that he had secured an additional £5 million from the June monitoring round to enhance routine maintenance services, whereby the allocation was passed to Transport NI to ensure a second grass cut across all areas and tackle the serious problem of potholes. Also on the list was an additional gully clean for urban communities, as well as the repair of street lighting outages. All of those are a major source of complaint for our constituents. The former Minister for Regional Development, Michelle McIlveen, and now Chris Hazzard have recognised the importance of investing in that aspect of maintenance by allocating additional resources.

I have recently been dealing with a number of complaints in my constituency about an issue that falls just outside the remit of the Department but for which it has an overseeing role: the role of utility companies and the impact of their work on the roads and streets that they dig up without consulting local people. They might dig a trench in a street

one week, causing major upheaval, leave and then come back the next week and dig just yards away. They leave a patchwork-quilt effect on our roads, streets and footpaths that, in the end, adds to the belief that the Department is responsible for the cost of dealing with that mess.

Another major problem is sinking manholes on roads. These are dangerous to road users and a nightmare for the residents who have to put up with the constant noise, which makes life difficult. Many think that the Department is also responsible for that, but it is the responsibility of outside arm's-length bodies.

A Cheann Comhairle, I am sorry if I drifted slightly off the motion, but this is all part of what people see as road maintenance and, therefore, as our responsibility. It would be great if we did not have the financial constraints faced by the Executive and it would be great if the Minister had the resources to cure all our ills, but those are not the times we are in. I know, however, that the Minister will continue to argue the case for a better deal on budget allocation to ensure that our roads are safe places on which to walk and drive. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Girvan: I, too, am in favour of the motion and the amendment. We have a deficit in the road maintenance budget, as identified in the motion. I appreciate that this is an ongoing problem that is becoming worse, year-on-year. However, there seems to be very little tie-up — I have difficulty with this — with those making claims for damage to a vehicle or whatever, with the result that quite a substantial amount of money is spent on paying out for claims. One example given to us was about what was deemed to be a pothole on a road. A few hundred pounds would have repaired that pothole, but, by the time it all came through, the Department had paid out not just hundreds but thousands of pounds in claims.

I am not sure of the exact figure, but quite a few thousand pounds were paid out in claims to motorists who had had wheel and suspension damage. We should look at that area to try to offset what we spend on claims.

We are in a very bad position as a result of the condition of our roads, and simply because of underinvestment. We are coming at it on the back of 40 years in which we were not able to spend much of our money on infrastructure. We were spending our money elsewhere because of a campaign of terrorism that was taking money from other areas.

Contractors add to problems on our roads. There is a lack of a joined-up approach among the service being put in, be it roads, street lighting, telecommunications, gas or water. You invariably hear about a lovely new surface being put down on a road and, three weeks later, somebody digging a track to put in a water main. Contractors had been told that the road was being resurfaced, and, as a consequence, they reinstate it. However, contractors do not always bring a road back to the original condition that they got it in. We need to focus on reinstatement to ensure that the contractors involved in the works reinstate the roads. Those contractors must not be allowed to leave a road in a certain condition and let Roads Service deal with it when it is resurfacing the road. We have to make sure that reinstatement is done correctly. Service providers who do not do it prior to a scheme coming forward should be made to foot the bill for proper reinstatement. In their work programmes, they are well aware that they will be

upgrading the gas network or the water mains, and there is a lack of forward planning. There should be total joined-up government. It is all dealt with in one Department so it should be totally joined up. One person should not be saying, "That is to deal with claims. As long as we have money for claims, it will keep our legal team going". On many occasions, that is what we are doing: keeping people in the legal profession employed fighting claims. We are not necessarily diverting our resource.

I appreciate what was said earlier about budget flexibility. The budget is constrained, and we have difficulty in tying up everything that we have to do in government in Northern Ireland, never mind additional work. We should ensure that the cake is shared accordingly and prioritise what we spend our money on. It is great to add some new network, but we should not always focus on that. Sometimes, maintaining and keeping our current infrastructure in a good condition is better than adding additional miles of motorway.

People will say that they really want to see their dual carriageway or motorway built. We had a major investment in the A8, and a new dual carriageway was built linking Belfast to Larne. To be honest, the volume of traffic on that road today is probably less than it was 20 years ago because of the reduction in the number of boats coming into Larne. The case for that road was made 20 years ago —

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

Mr Girvan: — which does not necessarily mean that it stands today. We should focus on maintaining and upgrading our existing road network —

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

Mr Girvan: — and prioritising where we spend on new roads.

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to contribute to this important debate, not least because of a more than passing interest in the matter when I spent time in the former Department for Regional Development. I still have the marks to prove it.

On my behalf and that of my party, I am happy to indicate broad support for the motion and the amendment. I want to assure the Minister that, although my party no longer takes its place on the Executive, we want, as members of the Opposition, to contribute positively on important issues. I hope that, in today's debate, he will find something useful in the contributions of non-Executive parties, especially contributions from the Ulster Unionist Benches.

3.45 pm

Structural maintenance and road maintenance generally have been amongst the Cinderella issues kept fairly low down the list of priorities of past Executives, certainly in proper financial planning. The situation that I inherited in my time at DRD, which had evolved over previous mandates, was one in which the funding of structural and routine maintenance was largely dependent on allocations made through the monitoring rounds in June, October and January annually, with most available in the final monitoring round. Clearly, that left the Department at a huge disadvantage. Not only was it poor logic economically, it made it virtually impossible for any of the contractors involved to properly plan the work involved in

winter months, having been forced to lay off experienced staff and workers earlier in the year because of the lack of contracts.

It is also worth stating that financial allocations made at the earliest point available, at the start of any financial year, would allow those in charge to properly plan the structural maintenance required in a managed way, leading to better value for the hard-pressed and long-suffering taxpayers as well as properly supporting the important road construction industry and the associated businesses, many of them small, indigenous firms providing employment opportunities to our constituents. Unfortunately, I was never able to win that argument around the Executive table. Indeed, it is a matter of regret to me that during my final period as Regional Development Minister, my Department was effectively starved of the financial resources it needed to provide a proper service for purely, in my view, cheap and sordid party political reasons.

Given that it is estimated that £130 million is required on an annual basis to simply maintain the existing road network in Northern Ireland, I was never in a position in my latter years in the Department to meet the needs not only of the road construction industry but the population of the country, who could not understand why such a basic demand was unmet by the then Executive. I genuinely hope that this issue can be fully and finally sorted out by this new Executive. I assume that, because of the fact that the Minister for Infrastructure is a party colleague of the Finance Minister, party politics will no longer have any place in the allocation of funds. I hope that the system of funding to the Department for Infrastructure can be urgently addressed and I look forward to hearing the Minister's comments on that issue.

The constituents who send us here from every part of Northern Ireland to make a positive difference on basic issues want to see the roads and carriageways properly maintained in a planned and sensible way. It is time to take the politics out of road maintenance and put the money in instead. I support the motion.

Mr Lynch: I, too, welcome the opportunity to speak on the motion. The condition of rural roads is a huge issue for those of us who come from rural communities. During the election campaign in the spring, I witnessed the severe state of rural roads across County Fermanagh. It was clear that local communities had dropped off the priority list regarding roads. Many sections of these roads were not fit for purpose and were a danger to the public. For some constituents, rural roads are an even greater priority than health and jobs.

On the day that Chris Hazzard was made Minister of the new Department for Infrastructure, I was sitting beside him. I sought and had a meeting with him that day and stressed the need for him to address the gap in the road maintenance budget. I described the state of the roads that I had witnessed and told him that the rural communities felt that they were being ignored and that many rural roads were dangerous and had suffered from a number of years of bad winters. He understood that, because he had been on many similar roads in South Down during the campaign.

I commend the Minister for moving quickly to announce additional funding measures in the rural initiative scheme.

I have spoken to the local transport officials, and they are very pleased with that extra funding. That programme of

work has already started in rural areas of Fermanagh, and I have a list of the 66 roads that are to be done in the near future. That is not the panacea to all our rural roads ills. However, it starts to tackle the worst sections, and it is very much welcomed by rural dwellers on the roads on which work has been completed.

In the debate today, I have not heard where the extra millions are going to come from. People talked about money trees, but nobody outlined the solutions or where the money will come from. I support the motion and the amendment.

Mr Easton: I support the motion and the amendment. The total resource budget for the Department for Infrastructure for the 2016-17 period was £372.8 million. That was a 5.7% budget reduction and a £21 million shortfall on previous budgets. That has added to the accelerating backlog — now at £1 billion — of maintenance issues that need resolved.

On the capital side, the total allocation to the Department was £384 million. That budget incorporated a ring-fenced allocation of £46 million for roads structural maintenance. We also see from the June monitoring round that the Department received additional resource funding of £5.3 million and additional capital funding of £22.9 million; a total of £28.2 million. The extra £5.3 million in resource funding allowed for two grass cuts, at a cost of £300,000; gully emptying, at £600,000; pothole repairs and patching, at £3.1 million; road markings, at £500,000; fixing of street lighting, at £500,000; and some repairs to flooding hotspot areas, at a cost of £300,000.

I agree that there has been a problem over several years with not enough resources being set aside for road maintenance. That has meant potholes not being repaired, street lights not being repaired, limited weed spraying and grass verges not being cut. All those things are important to the public, yet Transport NI is failing to get them done due to budget constraints. We can ask ourselves why maintenance is not being done, and the reasons are simple: our block grant has been cut and money is a lot tighter. Despite that, it is up to the Minister to decide how he gives the money to his Department to spend. However, that does not mean that I am not sympathetic to the shortfall in funding and do not recognise the need for more money. I recognise that many of the complaints that many of us are getting have been about potholes, grass not getting cut, street lights being out and, especially, a lack of weed spraying. Only one weed spray has been done by Transport NI this year, and that does not cut the mustard.

We can see from the evidence that failure to do the basic maintenance leads to major problems. For example, it has been revealed that £1 million has been paid out in compensation to drivers whose cars have been damaged by road defects over the last five years. There have been 7,500 claims lodged with Transport NI since 2011, with an average annual payout of £200,000. It has been revealed that there are more than 20,000 potholes across Northern Ireland. Had we had more resources for our maintenance budgets, many of those claims would simply not have happened, as the repairs to the footpaths and potholes would have helped prevent many accidents and tripping incidents. The result would have been that more money would have been saved and could have gone back into the maintenance budget.

There is not enough money, and we need to look at that if we are to address the problem. I have no doubt that there will be moneys coming through in future monitoring rounds. However, should the Department be relying on those monitoring rounds? While they are helpful, they do not resolve the budget shortfall.

To the party that tabled the motion, I say that it is all well and good to highlight the problems. However, can they tell us where they would get the money to fix these problems? What budgets would they cut from other Departments, and how would they pay for any extra funding?

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: Our next Member to speak will be Patsy McGlone, but I want to make him aware that I will be calling the Minister at 3.55 pm, so he will have two minutes if he wishes to avail himself of them.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Ní raibh a fhios agam faoi sin, ach cibé. Thank you, Madam Principal Deputy Speaker, for welcoming me to speak on the motion.

As mentioned by my SDLP colleagues, we brought the motion to the House because, as we approach the winter months, there are serious concerns around future deterioration of our roads. We have already had much publicity about the amounts of expenditure on compensation. I am sure that all of us have witnessed rims buckled and car tyres ruined as a result of serious potholes. Influence has to be brought to bear as regards the frequency of monitoring rural roads. Monitoring and checking those rural roads could save the Department an awful lot of money on compensation and indeed the admin that goes with it.

We have had a serious lack of maintenance on our roads in the North, not just rural roads but those in our cities, towns and suburbs. Of around 25,000 kilometres of roads in the North, more than 18,000 kilometres are rural roads, which means that this issue is more likely to affect rural roads. They are vital to our economy. Without adequately maintained roads, it is highly unlikely that we will be able to attract and support the infrastructural investment that is necessary across the North.

I am conscious of the time constraints, but one other vital point is the implications of Brexit on the maintenance and building of roads, given the amounts of money that were available to draw down in complementary schemes. I would like to hear from the Minister about whether any assessment is being made of —

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

Mr McGlone: — the amounts of money and matching funds that were drawn down by the Government.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I welcome the opportunity to debate the issues of roads structural maintenance with the Assembly and have listened with great interest to the issues and concerns that Members have raised. I recognise and share the concern expressed by Members about the gap between what we can spend on structural maintenance and what we need to spend. However, before addressing that issue, it is important to outline what exactly is meant by structural maintenance, as it is a phrase used to cover a variety of maintenance activities provided by my Department.

Structural maintenance is the collective term for activities that maintain the integrity of the road and footway structure. The main activities include resurfacing and reconstruction, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage, and they comprise both capital and resource funding. For example, capital funding is used to provide improved drainage and running surfaces, which have a positive effect on road safety by improving skid resistance. Resource funding is used to deliver the patching and repair of defect elements of structural maintenance.

As was pointed out by the proposer of the motion, a significant amount of funding is required annually to adequately maintain the integrity of our road network. In fact, in relation to the proposed amendment, I point out that my Department has prepared a structural maintenance funding plan that sets out a strategic view of the funding required to maintain the structural integrity of the network. The funding required is reviewed annually to reflect changes in the unit costs of materials and inflationary pressures. This independently established funding plan recommends that investment of some £141 million is needed annually to maintain the road network in its current condition and to avoid deterioration and wasteful expenditure on reactive patching.

The opening position for investment in structural maintenance was some £56 million of capital and resource in 2016-17, some £38 million of which was made available directly to external contractors. However, additional capital was prioritised by the Executive as part of June monitoring. As a result, and in recognition of the particular deterioration in rural roads, in June, I announced a £10 million rural roads initiative to target maintenance measures at some 1,000 locations on our rural roads. I am pleased to say that work on those schemes is now well under way. The current levels of investment, some £66 million of capital and resource, have to be seen in the light of significant levels of funding in previous years.

Ideally, funding for structural maintenance should be planned and consistent. I recognise the difficulties when that is not the case, particularly for our partners in the construction industry, an industry that has invested in plant and equipment to build the capacity to deliver. I met representatives of the Quarry Products Association (QPA) on 25 July. They raised that very point with me and, in particular, the difficulties that they face with the lack of funding certainty in-year and from year to year. Of course, I also recognise that underinvestment leads to network deterioration and the build-up of backlogs. As the motion points out, the current maintenance backlog is some £1 billion. That is the sum of money required to bring the whole network up to the industry-accepted level. From discussions with the QPA and my own officials, I appreciate that greater funding certainty early in the financial year would be very beneficial in order to get best value from the resources allocated, in terms of planning and undertaking the work in the most favourable weather conditions.

The ring-fencing of this budget provides further assurance to the industry.

4.00 pm

My Department is a capital-intensive Department with a budget of some £387 million, which is the largest of all the Departments. Although there is a significant case for increased structural maintenance funding, in addition to

roads, I have responsibility for a wide range of functions including water, waste water, public transport, flood alleviation and waterways, and I must prioritise finite funding across all the Department's functions, many of which require additional funding from what is available.

Our internal, regional and global connections are essential to the economic recovery of the North and to the spread of this recovery across the region as a whole. For example, the A6 and A5 schemes are vital to the economic development of the west and north-west and vital to our efforts to support the development of a more efficient supply chain across the North of Ireland. Unfortunately, there are not sufficient resources to fund all these activities together with other Executive priorities. Therefore, a balance must be struck in the allocation of capital between maintaining existing assets and investing in the new.

In recent years, as a consequence of how structural maintenance funding can be utilised at relatively short notice, the Executive have adopted a policy of using the in-year monitoring process to reallocate capital funding to ensure that it benefits the region and is not lost to the block. Although not ideal, such in-year additions are still of obvious benefit, and I will continue to press for such funding should it become available to me.

The future capital funding envelope for the region is currently unclear, particularly with the outcome of the EU referendum. As you all will be aware, the North has benefited greatly from EU funding, and the Executive will be working with the British Government to ensure that the impact of Brexit on our capital funding is not detrimental. I am also working with my Executive colleague the Finance Minister to explore new and innovative ways to cover any EU funding gaps and attract additional investment. Looking forward to Budget 2016, I will, of course, be working with Executive colleagues to achieve the best outcome for my Department and putting forward the points raised today to support my case.

I will now turn to Members' comments. Apart from in speeches from Alex Easton and Fra McCann, there was absolutely no mention of the wider political and economic climate in which the Executive are now operating. I find it hugely surprising and disappointing that we are discussing the Department's ability to invest adequately in our roads infrastructure without a single reference to Tory austerity and to the tens of millions of pounds that have been stripped out of our block grant. Moreover, our ability to ever tackle the £1 billion backlog in roads maintenance has been dealt a serious blow once again by Tories seeking to drag us out of Europe and cutting the cord to vital European infrastructure funding.

Jenny Palmer mentioned the figure of £50-odd million. In fact, Ms Palmer will no doubt be shocked to know that the figure from early scoping is anywhere between £300 million and £400 million of infrastructure funding alone. That is what we are set to lose. To discuss today's motion without any reference to this sort of environment is folly and short-sighted. I did not hear any answers on where we will go, and the proposers of the motion and, indeed, the amendment have to consider that.

Gerry Mullan attempted to draw a line between road deaths and road maintenance. That is unfortunate. Ninety-five per cent or more of all road deaths are due to human

error, not roads maintenance. I do not think that it is helpful to blur the line in that regard.

Kellie Armstrong said that we should consider not building all our new roads. Perhaps you mean the Ballynahinch bypass in your constituency, Kellie, or any of the new roads that we are looking set to build in Strangford, or do you mean just those in the west of the region? We have to talk about this. Transparency was needed today, and we did not get it.

The SDLP also talked about revenue-raising issues and said that we need to look at revenue raising. Any ideas would be gratefully received, and I am happy to discuss them but, as usual, none came forward.

Jenny Palmer also raised, as did Danny himself, how Danny Kennedy, as a former Minister, was starved of funds. One only has to look at Danny's budgets during the year to see that this simply is not the case. In 2013-14 alone, £130 million was spent on structural maintenance, £61 million of which came through in-year monitoring. You were either starved of funds in-year or you were not. Sixty-one million pounds is more than what we started off this year with, so it does not sound to me as if Danny was starved of funds. It is time to dispel that myth once and for all. Political choices were made. We heard today about the A8. Perhaps the A8 was a vanity project. I do not know, but maybe that money could have been better spent elsewhere.

The last Member's comment that I want to speak about is that of Paul Girvan. I agree with Paul entirely about the reinstatement of roads and their priority and the need for joined-up government. I am delighted to announce that that is the case in our rural roads initiative; some of our rural roads projects have been held back until NI Water completes various projects. That is the case in my constituency of South Down, and that is what I want to see in all our roads projects going forward.

In conclusion, I trust that the House will be assured of my commitment to supporting the funding of roads structural maintenance and that it is certainly high on my priorities, both this year and looking forward to Budget 2016. Although, at this stage, I cannot provide assurances as to the amount of funding that will be available, I certainly support the provision of a substantial allocation from my Department's baseline that could be ring-fenced to provide greater assurance of provision in the future.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that loud conversations should not be taking place on the Benches. We do not expect total silence, but, if exchanges with colleagues cannot be brief and quiet, they should be conducted outside the Chamber.

Ms Armstrong: I thank everyone who spoke on the amendment and the motion. I think that, around the House, there is widespread agreement that we need more infrastructure investment. That should be good news for the Minister to hear, because we all recognise that there is an issue with infrastructure that has been going on for many years. As the Chair of the Infrastructure Committee highlighted, that is a legacy of the Troubles.

This year, we have a £21 million budget reduction, which puts more pressure on departmental budgets. As we know, reactive expenditure is 10 times more expensive than planned maintenance. Declan McAleer highlighted that this is an important debate — one of the most

important debates that we have — that affects most of our constituents across Northern Ireland. Jenny Palmer talked about the underinvestment. George Robinson also talked about the underinvestment and asked us where we would get the money from. I provided a suggestion and asked whether we should spend money on new things now when we should be looking after what we have, because —

Mr Hazzard: Will the Member give way?

Ms Armstrong: I will, yes.

Mr Hazzard: I accept the Member's point, but, for transparency, would she like to name some of the projects that she thinks we should not move forward with?

Ms Armstrong: I stated —

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you. During my presentation earlier, I stated that I would like to see everything being bought and that I would like to see new roads. I just do not think, as a mother and a housekeeper, that this is the right time to be spending money that we do not have. I do think that our roads need to be repaired and be put forward in a safe way so that our constituents and people in Northern Ireland can drive about safely.

An important point was made by Paul Girvan when he talked about the reinstatement of roads. I have seen so many roads across Northern Ireland that have a line up the middle, where a utility company has been, and that have not been repaired. The more driving that happens, the more the road disintegrates, and those roads are not being repaired. We need to think about vehicle claims and reinstatement costs.

A strategic maintenance plan would consider all those types of innovations. It would allow the Department to look, as the Minister said, at what else is potentially out there, at who else we can work with and where else we can get money from to deal with the backlog. As I said, the backlog will not be dealt with in this mandate, but over many years, and we need a strategic plan in place.

I can understand when people talk about ring-fencing an amount of money. I worked with the former Department for Regional Development, many years before, when ring-fencing was talked about on many occasions. On many occasions, when the Budget came forward, the ring fence was done away with and whatever was left was available. Unless they are absolutely guaranteed, ring-fenced moneys will not be there. However, as someone who is used to presenting business cases, I know that if you have a presented argument that has been costed out and you have really thought about and rationalised why it is there, you have a stronger case. Rather than us just ring-fencing, a strategic plan that considers all the opportunities and innovations that we need is something that Northern Ireland would appreciate. In the amendment, I asked for that to be published so that our constituents can see for themselves where the priorities will be, when their roads will potentially be fixed and when we can have a better Northern Ireland for travelling around.

Mr McPhillips: I thank each and every Member who has contributed to the debate. As the SDLP MLA for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the state of roads and the roads network in

my constituency and across the North, which has been the subject of decades of neglect with little service improvement.

Before dealing specifically with Fermanagh and South Tyrone, I acknowledge that the road maintenance budget deficit sits at around £1 billion. That is astronomical. That £1 billion would bring our roads only up to the requisite standard; it is not what it would cost to have excellent roads.

In the past month, we have learned that the Department for Infrastructure's budget going forward will be cut by 9%. I can only imagine that rural constituencies such as mine will be the first to fall foul of the budgetary decrease. I call on the Minister — I am glad to see he is here to respond to the debate — to outline the nature of the cuts and how they will impact on the road maintenance budget, especially in the west.

As my colleague Mr Mullan highlighted, the road maintenance budget has faced years of underfunding. It has been estimated that it would take in the region of £137 million to £141 million a year to maintain the current state of our roads network. Last year, we all felt the brunt of this as a budget cut of £22 million resulted in grass verges not being cut, street lamps not being repaired and cutbacks to essential road repair programmes. That has all had a devastating impact across the North. It does not inspire much confidence, and that is why the SDLP brought the motion to the House.

When you look across my constituency, you see that public transport is not at a level that is required. We have no railway service, and buses do not serve many of our rural communities — at least not on a consistent enough basis. The people of Fermanagh and South Tyrone are heavily reliant on their personal transport for getting to work and for accessing health and hospital services, education facilities, banks and post offices. Access to those services can be a big challenge, and it is vital that these communities, many of which are rural, have a properly maintained road infrastructure.

The reality is that the people in Fermanagh are sick and tired of the state of our roads and the road network. They simply do not believe that they get a fair slice of the cake from Stormont and that Fermanagh, especially rural areas, gets the attention and funding it truly deserves. If we look across the whole western division, which includes Fermanagh and goes right up to Derry and mid-Ulster, we see that the road maintenance budget has depreciated from £35 million in 2011-12 to £18 million in the last financial year. That severely impacts not only the current state of the roads but any road improvement initiatives.

Every single week, I receive complaints from constituents about cars hitting potholes and other road defects from places like Belcoo, Garrison, Derrygonnelly, Lisnaskea, Rosslea and Newtownbutler. We have to ask ourselves this: why have the Fermanagh roads got into such a terrible state? In January this year, following extensive flooding in the area, £600,000 was promised for road improvement schemes in Wattlebridge, Newtownbutler —

Mr Lynch: Will the Member give way?

Mr McPhillips: No, I have too much to say, Mr Lynch. I do not have time at this point.

Improvements were also promised for Derrylin Road, Lisnaskea, Smith's Strand, Lisnaskea and Inishmore Road, Lisbellaw. We are now almost nine months on, and I have yet to see any improvement in those roads for the people who are dependent on them and use them daily. Many families in and around the Boho area were marooned last winter for weeks on end and had to make detours of up to 20 miles to get children to school.

As I said, flooding is a major concern in Fermanagh and has cut off roads, which are the lifeline to many of these rural communities. What assurances can the Minister give those families and the many others around Lisnaskea and Newtownbutler and in townlands like Inishroosk, Kilmore Quay, Derrylin, Derrylea and Newtownbutler that his Department will have prevention measures in place sooner rather than later? In 2016, families should not have to endure such problems in everyday life.

To conclude my remarks on this section, I think it is important that the Assembly invests properly in road maintenance, as it impacts on the everyday life of the people who elect us, none more than the people of Fermanagh. A ring-fenced allocation will allow for more strategic planning and a more managed approach, which will hopefully see our roads brought to an excellent standard.

Turning now to a summary of some of the points Members made, Kellie Armstrong moved the amendment, made the case for a long-term strategic investment plan and highlighted the need for more capital funding to undertake it. She questioned whether all the flagship projects should be completed at the same time.

William Humphrey mentioned the security threat due to terrorism over the years as a contributing factor.

Declan McAleer mentioned —

4.15 pm

Ms Dillon: Will the Member give way?

Mr McPhillips: I have too much to say; I do not have time.

— his constituency of West Tyrone. He stated that the west had been neglected for years in the road maintenance budget. I certainly agree with him and support everything that he said.

Paul Girvan mentioned joined-up thinking and forward planning between the utility companies. Nobody could disagree with that either.

Throughout the debate, the one question that seemed to be asked time and again — it was asked by Declan McAleer to begin with — was where the money would come from. It was curious that he said that, essentially, with Brexit and further budget cuts, there was a lot less money, not more. His comments showed a paucity of ambition, a failure of imagination and an inability to think outside the box or to make a paradigm shift. That is what is needed: ambition, imagination and a paradigm shift.

Here are some of the big answers for Mr McAleer and others who asked where the money is to be found. First, we suggest that the First Minister and deputy First Minister do not employ a spin doctor. However, given Mr McAleer's utter failure to think boldly, Sinn Féin and the DUP will need a lot of spin. Secondly, do not spend £80

million through the social investment fund when there are better, more effective and better value-for-money neighbourhood renewal schemes that the money could be spent on. Thirdly, do not allow the DUP to continue to strangle North/South work. The scale of what could be done on infrastructure planning, health, procurement and so much more is enormous. It would not only make money go further on the island but deliver better public services for the people of Ireland. Fourthly, the motion is about the Assembly creating a position of strength on the issue of spend on roads around the Programme for Government and Budget negotiations. However, Mr McAleer and others are already saying that there is no money, selling the pass before the negotiations have ended. What a weak place to be, but it was ever thus. All the big new roads — Carrick to Jordanstown, Ballymoney to Ballymena and Larne to Ballynure — are in the east, while not a foot of the A5 or the A6 has been started or even opened. Talk about getting your eye wiped.

I ask the House to support our motion.

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

Main Question, as amended, put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly is concerned that the road structural maintenance budget deficit is currently estimated to be £1 billion; notes the importance of road maintenance to road safety, especially in rural areas; further notes that it is estimated that over £137 million per annum is needed to adequately maintain, in its current state, the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to develop and publish a costed strategic plan for road maintenance and repair that will be included as part of the Department for Infrastructure's ongoing work programme from 2017-18 until the end of the mandate.

Madam Principal Deputy Speaker: I invite Members to take their ease while we change the top Table.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Health Service Provision: North Antrim

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): In conjunction with the Business Committee, I have given leave to Mr Mervyn Storey to raise the matter of the future of the health service in North Antrim. The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. All other Members who wish to speak will have four minutes.

Mr Storey: First, I apologise to the House and the Minister for not being present for question 13 to the Justice Minister.

I welcome the opportunity early in the mandate to raise issues of concern and also to place on record my appreciation for the provision of health services in my North Antrim constituency.

I am well aware of the timing of this particular debate. We may soon have a public debate and discussion around the findings and recommendations of the Bengoa panel, so I recognise that that may limit what I had hoped the Minister would say, but I see that she is not present. We will therefore have to talk to ourselves and hope that the Minister finds time to read the Hansard report of the comments that we make.

I am also aware of the comments that were made by Professor Bengoa when he was appointed earlier this year. He said:

“Over the last 40 years, there had been a focus in health on planning around structures instead of planning around patient needs and outcomes.”

Members will therefore not be surprised that I want to refer to structures in the provision of healthcare in North Antrim. Some are pivotal to and some essential for the continued delivery of health provision in North Antrim.

At the outset, I pay tribute to those who work in the health service and provide for us, day and daily, a service that we ought to be proud of. We see how well the Opposition parties are arrayed this evening. I have lost count of how many of them there are here. It is always easy for them to be critical. It is always easy to find the point at which you will criticise something, but it is a lot more difficult to give credit when things go well. I say to the almost 12,000 staff who work in the Northern Trust area a word of thanks and appreciation. The trust provides services to a population of some 436,000 from a budget of some £600 million.

I welcome the Minister to the House. She will now not have to read in Hansard my earlier comments. She will not be surprised to hear that, in the time that I have, I want to concentrate on the Causeway locality in particular. Members will know that there are now four localities in the Northern Trust area since its reorganisation. Again, I pay tribute to those who have helped in the turnaround of the Northern Trust. Some time ago, there were concerns about its future existence. Indeed, there was talk about it

maybe being merged with or taken over by the Western Trust. However, I believe that we now have a degree of stability. I pay tribute to those who have worked hard over the past number of months on that particular issue. I will concentrate on a number of elements key to the delivery of healthcare. My constituency colleagues will refer to other elements of the provision in North Antrim when they make their contributions.

Let me turn to the Causeway Hospital. North Antrim is unique in many ways. It is unique in the fact that it does not have an acute hospital within its parliamentary boundary. We are served by two acute hospitals: one in East Londonderry and the other in South Antrim. I well remember having had opportunity in my previous job and as a patient and parent to access what was the Route Hospital. Of course, it, along with the Mary Ranken Maternity Hospital in Coleraine, became the new Causeway Hospital. In our area, we have bought into the provision at the Causeway Hospital. I welcomed the fact that, back in 2011, there was a commitment from the then Health Minister to ensure that the Causeway Hospital: "is here to stay." I trust that that will continue to be the case. Of course, we had all the naysayers who spread, I have to say, very dangerous comments that it would close.

We have to be cautious when people use a platform only for political purposes when there is no substance to what is being said. That causes fear, concern and anxiety, first, to the patients who are served by the hospital, and, secondly, to the staff who work there.

I want to pay tribute to the Causeway support group, which I have worked with on many occasions over the last number of months. People like Dr Owen Finnegan and others in that group make an invaluable and informed contribution to the future of the service at the Causeway Hospital.

I want to drill down into some details in relation to the Causeway Hospital. The over-65s account for 30% of our population, the highest of any of the trusts. We need to recognise that that is a particular challenge. As someone who is now heading towards that age, I am always careful to ensure that I declare an interest. The trust does acknowledge that there is a challenge in the age profile of its area.

The other important figure is that 70% of inpatient beds at the Causeway Hospital are from the over-65s category. That focuses on and creates a challenge for the delivery of services. The over-75 population is expected to grow by 32% between 2012 and 2021. The Causeway Coast and Glens has the highest projected rise in over-75s in the health service area, and the Causeway will have the fastest-growing elderly population in the region over the next 10 years.

As someone whose father spent most of last year in the Causeway Hospital, apart from a few months in the Royal Victoria, I know all too well the care and attention that is given by the staff in that hospital. I have no doubt that but for their care and attention my father's health today would be severely limited.

A&E is pivotal to the delivery of the service at the Causeway. Year on year, we have seen a rise of 2% to 4% in A&E attendance. However, attendance by the over-75s has grown by 4% to 6%. Again, that is an issue that needs to be taken into account. Elective admissions grew by 3% in 2014-15 and by 7% in 2015-16. That clearly demonstrates the need for the retention of services,

particularly those focused on delivering for our senior citizens and A&E.

We need to tie that in with a comment by the Causeway support group in one of its publications recently:

"Causeway has an excellent, internationally recognised chronic pain clinic, which remains under resourced, but has the potential to become a regional Centre of Excellence".

With an increasingly elderly population, there are the associated challenges that that brings.

That brings us to ensuring that the Causeway Hospital is given its place in regional services. I said just prior to the Minister coming into the Chamber that she will shortly be in receipt, if she is not already, of the Bengoa report. There will be talk of regional services. What we want to see at the Causeway, and what I want to see, is building upon the expertise that we do have, particularly around chronic pain and other services.

In recent days we had negative comment.

It would be remiss of me if I did not say this, and I say it with all my sympathy to those families who, unfortunately, could not concur with my comments on the service that they believe was not provided when there were particular problems and issues that led to very sad circumstances, which have been highlighted recently in the media. I am referring, of course, to obstetrics. There are some 1,500 deliveries per annum in the Causeway, and there is a continual need for a consultant-led unit. Obviously, in view of the geographic isolation, it is a concern that that will be replaced by a midwife-based service. There is also a reasonable argument for the Causeway to be a major obstetric centre for the trust in view of the proximity of the Antrim Area Hospital to Belfast. I say that in recognition also of the concerns that have been raised even recently. I want to place on record the issue in regard to the continuance of the hospital. I think that the services that underpin it are vital. I want to ensure that we make progress in providing for our over-65s, our over-75s and the ever-increasing population in that part of the world.

4.30 pm

Let me turn to Dalriada Hospital in the northern part of the Northern Trust area and of the North Antrim constituency. The previous Minister and others are well aware of the campaign that took place when there was a proposal to close Dalriada. The people in Ballycastle and the glens do feel a particular challenge in relation to isolation and distance, given that they gravitate towards Antrim Area Hospital or the Causeway Hospital. I lay on record our appreciation of the trust's commitment to the Dalriada pathfinder model. I believe that that is giving us an example of what can be done in terms of provision. I will leave that point there because I am well aware that my time is fast moving on.

I want to move to the Robinson Hospital in Ballymoney, which is a unique jewel in the Northern Trust's crown, given its history and the contribution that Samuel Robinson made, and which his trust continues to make, to health provision. I would appreciate it if the Minister could give us an update on where we are at with the proposed capital build at the Robinson Hospital. It plays a very important part. I pay tribute to the GPs in the health centre who

work in conjunction with the Robinson Hospital. I believe that that particular community provision is an example of how community hospitals should be at the centre of our community and could help to alleviate the pressures at the Causeway, which they do.

Obviously, health is very multifaceted and there are many elements to it, not least the fact that the issue of residential care is a particular challenge for the trusts. I want to make reference to the Roddens residential home. There has been a concern for some considerable time that there have been no admissions from the Robinson Hospital, despite requests having been made and despite circumstances where I believe people could have been admitted to the Roddens but were not. I ask the Minister to look at this issue, because it is unacceptable that people and families in my constituency have to travel long distances to get residential care.

I would appreciate it if the Minister could give us an update on the renal dialysis unit, which I have been campaigning for since I was elected to the House in 2003. We believe that the business case has now been completed and that progress is being made. Maybe the Minister will be able to tell us when that can be delivered in the Causeway Hospital.

I conclude by saying that these are only a small element of the provision of health in the North Antrim area, but they are key component parts, which I trust will continue to be delivered and built upon in the future.

Mr McGuigan: Ar an chéad dul síos, is féidir liom a rá gur onóir dom bheith ag labhairt den chéad uair sa Tionól ar an ábhar seo agus is pribhléid dom bheith ag obair ar son na ndaoine in Aontroim Thuaidh. It has been a while — 10 years in fact — since I last spoke in the Chamber. So, at the beginning of my contribution today I want to reiterate that it is a great honour and privilege to be allowed to represent the citizens of North Antrim and, along with my Sinn Féin team, I hope to do it well. Whether you live in Carey glen or Glenravel glen, Ballintoy or Ballybogy, Dunloy or Dervock, Cloney or Clogh, Ballycastle or Broughshane and everywhere in between, my office door will be open.

I want to thank my old sparring partner from our days in Ballymoney Borough Council, Mervyn Storey, for bringing this debate to the House. I am delighted to be reunited with Mervyn and look forward to working constructively with him and all the North Antrim Members on behalf of the people we serve.

The future of healthcare provision in North Antrim is one of the important issues for citizens there, probably the most important issue. Nobody could underestimate the challenges that this brings for the Minister, the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and all healthcare providers, and I am delighted that the Minister is here for this contribution.

Before continuing, I also want to thank those who work in the healthcare profession for their selfless service and excellent care. In my new role, I hope to work positively with the management of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and staff to ensure that the health and well-being needs of all my constituents are met.

In my three short weeks in this role, I have already received representations from a number of constituents covering waiting times for referrals and other specific treatment issues. I am acutely aware of the current pressures facing citizens requiring treatment and, in turn,

the onus that this puts on the health service and on health service staff.

I welcomed the words of the Minister in the Chamber last week during another health related debate when she said:

“I wish to reiterate that tackling excessive waiting times is high on my agenda for delivering improvements in the health service. I want to assure patients and their families again that long waiting times are completely unacceptable to me and I that understand the worry and stress that people feel when they are waiting to hear when they will be seen.” — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 117, p77, col 2].

Who could not agree with that?

North Antrim is a largely rural constituency covering a large geographical area, including Rathlin Island. This, in itself, throws up challenges including travelling time, access to services, emergency response times and much more. Ambulance response times are a genuine concern in life-threatening situations for people living in the glens and in other remote geographical locations in North Antrim and need careful consideration in any future plans for the health service.

As has been said already, constituents in North Antrim, are served by two acute hospitals — the Causeway in Coleraine and Antrim Area Hospital. They are also served by two community hospitals — the Robinson in Ballymoney and the Dalriada in Ballycastle.

My colleague had twice as long to speak, so he could afford to go into twice as much detail. I support, and have been on record as supporting, the efforts to protect and build on all these local facilities and I will continue to make the case for equality and access for the people of North Antrim.

I know that the Health Minister is studying the report on the future of health services, led by Professor Bengoa, and I look forward to hearing the Minister's views on how we, as a society, can secure and improve health service delivery across the full spectrum of health provision. That approach will require careful nourishment by her securing and building on the strengths in her current provision.

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

Mr McGuigan: OK. We can deliver better outcomes for the people and ensure that our health service works for the people and makes our lives better. This is a difficult task given the finite budget and will require parties across the House to continue to achieve this.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member's time is up. I remind Members that they have four minutes.

Mr Swann: I thank and congratulate my constituency colleague Mervyn Storey in bringing this debate to the House. It is unfortunate that the timing means that we are on the wrong side of the publication of the Bengoa report. It was actually meant to be in front of the Health Committee last week. Possibly, if the report had been published, this debate might have been slightly more —

Mr Storey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Swann: Certainly.

Mr Storey: The Member may be aware that the panel, particularly Professor Bengoa, visited the Causeway and I believe that was a very valuable visit. I trust that that,

at least, gave some input to his thinking and on what the recommendations may or may not say.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Swann: Thank you very much. I know that the Member started off with a detailed brief on the Causeway, but one of the things we have seen from every health review that has come about, or has been proposed, is actually on the provision of facilities.

When Mr Storey was finishing up, he touched on the Roddens and Pinewood, the two statutory care homes that are still left in the constituency. I think every Member who has represented North Antrim has made representation and presentation about the continuation and support of those two facilities and also about allowing a permanent admissions policy — not just the security and certainty of those homes as facilities, but security and provision for the people who are trying to get into them and who are currently in them, and also the staff who are working in them. There have been proposals in the past by the trust to facilitate Pinewood or move it in a different direction, so it is really about getting an update from the Minister on how that ties in with the trust's thinking, if it is there in Bengoa and if it is something that we should still be looking at.

With regard to Dalriada, an excellent campaign was raised and fought by the community there to retain it, and not just as a facility or the provision of the step-down beds, which were essential and are still crucial for the Robinson and the Causeway to continue. It is also about the MS respite provision that is present in Dalriada. The former Sinn Féin Member for North Antrim, like all of us, was very vocal about Dalriada, the Roddens and Pinewood, to make sure that that permanent provision was still there, especially when it covers the north coast area. It is not just about the glens, because the MS respite provision goes across into East Londonderry as well. I would like reassurance from the Minister that Bengoa is not going to start and raise the heads of the problems that the potential closure of Pinewood, the potential closure of the Roddens or the potential closure of Dalriada or some of its provision may bring about.

When we talked at that stage about the future of Dalriada as a step-down facility, one of the things that became apparent when it was debated a number of times in the House was care provision, home support and home care packages. From the level of work going through my constituency office, there seems to be a greater demand for care packages and a difficulty in providing them, whether that is through the statutory service or private providers. I am working with a number of families who would like to get a loved one home, but the care package is not there. It is that family's pride and dignity, I suppose, because they do not want their relative to be referred to as, or considered to be, a bed-blocker. While that facility is not there to bring them to their own home where they can look after them with additional support, it puts the pressure on them and on the facilities themselves.

I know that I only have four minutes, but Rathlin was mentioned. With regard to Bengoa and the increased pressures that are falling on the Northern Trust and the health service, I want reassurance from the Minister that the full-time nursing provision is going to be maintained on Rathlin, and that there is no threat to it either through Bengoa or any reduction in the health service.

I will finish by asking the Minister to have a word with the chief executive of the Northern Trust, Tony Stevens, to see whether he might actually respond to some of my correspondence — that would be quite helpful, as well.

Mr Frew: I support my colleague Mervyn Storey in bringing this to the Assembly. Mervyn has been campaigning for many years for a decent and better health service for the people of North Antrim, and I commend him for that and for bringing this debate to highlight the issue to the Minister. Also, I am glad that the Minister is able to make it here for this Adjournment debate.

Looking back on the history of the constituency of North Antrim and its health service, all of us will recognise that, when we meet with the hierarchs of the service and quiz them about the historical linkage and hospital sites, every one of them will mention that they now feel that the Antrim Area Hospital was built in the wrong place. That is nothing against Antrim — certainly not — but it could well have saved an acute hospital. It may well have saved money, better provisions and fewer buildings in North Antrim and, in fact, in the whole of Northern Ireland. So, decisions that are taken now will echo for decades in any given area of Northern Ireland. That is why it is very important that, when we make decisions, we make the right ones. We have a real duty of care to worry not just about the here and now but about the next generation coming along and the generation after that, because they will be impacted by the decisions that Ministers in the House today make.

4.45 pm

Mr Lyons: I thank the Member for giving way. He talks about long-term planning. Is it not also important that the Minister continues to invest in preventative measures that can help to save money now and in the future? A number of constituents have contacted me, and I have been in contact with the Minister, on one specific example, which is diabetes education. Diabetes has the potential to be a massive cost to the health service in the future. Is it not important that we educate people and take as many preventative steps as we can to help people now and in the future?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Frew: I thank the Member for that contribution. That is a very important point. Whilst the burden will be on the health service and the Health Minister, it will be a burden for us all, because, ultimately, we will all pay for it through our pockets or our health. We will all be burdened and will rely on the health service to get us out of the mess if we can. It is a very important point, but it is very hard.

Civil Service land talks about preventative spend. It is a great phrase, but nobody knows what it means, what it costs or how much we pay now to get results in the future. It is very hard to justify that on a balance sheet or in a budget line. That is where any Minister has to be brave and say, "Here is what we feel. If we have preventative spend now and educate the public in it, this is what we will save long term". It is not only in pennies and pounds; it is in health. If there is anywhere that that can be done, it is in the health service. Our health and the health service have the potential to bust us and to bankrupt any nation state, especially in the civilised world. So, it is something that needs to be looked at.

As someone who goes through North Antrim hospitals and meets nurses and doctors who work there, I see the real value in all the hospitals. There are nearly too many to mention. I am nearly scared to mention them in case the Minister thinks that there are too many and we should start to close some. They all provide specific services for needs. The pathfinder programme in Dalriada typifies what the community can add to all this. There you had a facility under threat; the community got together with all the elected representatives, and we worked through plans and progress as to what could happen. I believe that that is something that the Minister can look at, pick up on and run with. That could be a pilot scheme that could be washed out throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. It would not be specific, but you could change it and use it in general right across the country. That is something that people will really value. People want a piece of the health service. They want to feel valued by it, so that when they need it, it will be there and they will be reassured by it.

One thing that I will raise in my short time is the need for intermediate beds in Ballymena. We do not have any, and it is something that we should look towards. It is not easy, and we do not want to work in patchworks, but the fact that the major town of Ballymena has no intermediate beds really needs to be looked at.

Mr Logan: I thank my colleague Mr Storey for bringing the debate to the House today. Leaving Northern Ireland aside, we are very fortunate in North Antrim to have an excellent health and care system. Mr McGuigan picked up on some of the issues coming through his constituency office, and, even at this early stage, I have the same. So, we are well aware. I welcome the fact that the Minister said last week at Question Time that waiting lists are not defensible. I welcome that, but, leaving that aside because that is an issue all over, when people get to the other end of that waiting list, the service that they receive is first class. The service that they receive from our GPs and front-line service people is first class.

We have been very fortunate in the past year in North Antrim, and particularly in Ballymena, to have had significant investment in healthcare facilities — needful but significant. Ballymena has gained a state-of-the-art centre, which was officially opened by the then Health Minister, Simon Hamilton, on 18 February. Ballymena Health and Care Centre is the largest healthcare facility of its kind to date in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wells said it was something he would have loved to see created 20 times more over Northern Ireland in his time as Health Minister. We are, of course, leading the way on that. I pay tribute to some of our councillors for lobbying for that healthcare centre for many years. We are delighted to see that it boasts six GP practices, locally accessible acute, primary and community care services, a mental health consultation wing, a separate children's wing and dental services. The building provides a hub for healthcare in the local area. It allows primary care, mental health and other teams to be co-located, which makes healthcare as a whole more efficient.

There is also a new ambulance station in Ballymena. That is the new north sector division headquarters, consolidating the activities from Coleraine into Ballymena. That was done to streamline administration, provide training and make it all more efficient. It provides accommodation for around 58 staff, and up to 12 vehicles

can be garaged there to make sure they are viable for the long-term.

I was very pleased to see in July this year that at a meeting of Mid and East Antrim Borough Council's planning committee it was decided that the First Presbyterian church in Ahoghill, my home village, is to be transformed into a new medical centre catering for around 5,000 patients. There will be minimal change to the historic building, which dates back to 1858 — I think maybe Mr Storey remembers it being built — but it will be a very useful, modern healthcare facility that will serve the local community.

These moves forward for healthcare in North Antrim are great, but we cannot be complacent. There is still much to do and, like a good Presbyterian, I have a three-point sermon prepared that I will get on to very quickly. We need to invest in people, invest in the system and invest in the future.

We need the Assembly to invest in our people employed in the healthcare centres. I recognise that the contribution made by staff in the NHS is invaluable to the functioning of Northern Ireland's health service. I also know of the pressures facing the profession, especially around staff numbers.

We need the Assembly to invest in the system of our healthcare. By investing in health infrastructure — something the DUP would like to achieve — we have already seen some of those benefits within Ballymena. A digitalised system would be fantastic for the rest of Northern Ireland. We also have to have a continued strategy across all Departments to tackle health inequalities, which is one of the indicators in the Programme for Government.

Finally, we need the Assembly to invest in the future of our healthcare by investing in a health service that is fit for the 21st century. That means more innovation. We need to move towards —

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

Mr Logan: — a digitalised healthcare system with electronic healthcare records for Northern Ireland. E-health has already helped to revolutionise the delivery of health and social care for patients. To finish —

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

Mr Logan: Thanks for the opportunity to bring this.

Mr Allister: To distil the health needs and issues of North Antrim into four minutes is probably impossible. I think if there is one core issue of concern as we go forward, particularly as we await the Bengoa panel, it is to underwrite and underscore the necessity of maintaining the acute facilities of the Causeway Hospital. Without them, there is such a gap in provision for the whole northern part of North Antrim that it is unthinkable. The Minister's predecessor made this commitment in the House. He committed to retaining Causeway Hospital as a small acute hospital and said:

"The model for services ... will be based around an acute hospital in Coleraine, with an Emergency Department, and supporting clinical services". — [Official Report (Hansard), Bound Volume 102, WA 234].

My first question to the Minister is this: can she reaffirm that commitment? With or without the Bengoa panel

report, is there a commitment to maintain that? It is vital to the services afforded to the people in North Antrim.

Equally, we need to maintain the maternity unit there on a consultant-led basis. That is the ideal, and it must be maintained. Mr Storey refers to people raising rumours and attacks. Of course, the primary individual with profile who raised a rumour 18 months ago about the future of the Causeway was his MP, so I am a little surprised that, in this debate, he has been attacking him in that regard. However, there is concern in the context of the Bengoa report, in which the whole ethos, we are told, is about moving towards more community care, yet many of us cannot see it in our communities. We do not see the advance of community care. What we hear about from many of our constituents is a contraction, not an expansion, of community care. There is less time, not more, for individuals in their own homes.

We have the dichotomy of a protestation that everything looks rosy: by moving forward and intensifying community care, we can have fewer acute hospitals; but the reality that we see in our constituency is very different. Hence the necessity to underscore and commit irreversibly to the retention of the Causeway Hospital and the other facilities.

We saw the attempts — the crass attempts — to undo the provision in Ballycastle's in the Dal. Thankfully, that was derailed, but the mentality that induced that situation still, I fear, exists in many of the management structures of the Northern Trust and elsewhere.

We have seen successive Ministers, not just this one but her DUP predecessors, refuse to take the fundamental liberating step for the statutory nursing homes of removing the shackles and allowing admissions, underscoring for many of us again the agenda to try to run down those homes. You cannot say, "I am committed to a statutory home and see a future for it", if, at the same time, you deny it the lifeblood of admissions. By failing to take that fundamental step, Ministers from both parties have failed in that fundamental task of securing the future of those homes

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

Mr Allister: I hope that this debate will be timely. I hope that it will not be overcome by disappointing news when the Bengoa panel reports.

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

Mr Allister: In this debate, we are laying down markers for what is needed.

Mr Durkan: The debate takes place in the context that we still await the publication of the Bengoa report. Mr Swann lamented the fact that we had not seen it yet. He thought that the debate might have been secured in anticipation that we would have seen it. I take a contrary view: I think that this might be a case of Mr Storey and, subsequently, the rest of the MLAs from the constituency getting their retaliation in first.

The debate underlines the importance of the Minister releasing the Bengoa report as quickly as possible. I do not ask the Minister to rush it, and I do not think that anyone could accuse her of doing so at this stage. There is a lot to deliberate on, but it is important to get the report

out and for the Minister, subsequently or in tandem with that, to reveal her vision for its implementation.

As long as the report is not out in the public domain — as long as we do not know what is in the Bengoa report or what the Minister's reading of it is — there will be a cloud over every element of healthcare, certainly hospital provision, right across the North.

A lot of Members touched on the Bengoa report. Mr Allister's final point about the move to community care and the need to resource it was very important. Transforming Your Care was the road map to a better healthcare system, and I think that everyone in the Chamber agreed with its direction of travel and indeed probably its destination. The sad reality is that no one put petrol into the car, and we never got out of the forecourt to move towards reaching that destination. I do not expect the destination outlined in the Bengoa report to be drastically different.

I think what we have learnt, however, is that it is of vast importance to resource that journey.

5.00 pm

It is imperative that we as an Assembly do all that we can to support the Minister in any bids that she makes for her Department to receive additional funding to ease the transition to the system of healthcare that we need in order to be sustainable. That does not mean, "Close all hospitals". Mr Storey made some very good points about what care or types of specialist care can be provided in specific areas. That should be explored, and it is something that will give heart and some solace to the people working in those areas as well. Like I said, I urge the Minister — I do not mean for her to get a move on — to release the report as soon as possible. Otherwise, she could be back here next week answering MLAs from another constituency, and that could go on and on.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): I thank the Member for proposing the topic for the Adjournment debate. I have been very impressed by the considered and valuable contributions that everybody made throughout the discussion. I will attempt to address all the points raised, but, if I do not pick up on something, I will be very happy to write to Members to provide confirmation.

Everybody can agree on where we need to go with healthcare, particularly when it comes to the points raised about early intervention, prevention, tackling health inequalities and making sure that we have fit-for-purpose care packages in place. We need to look seriously at social care and at what we are doing on that end of health and social care. We can all agree that we need to invest in people, in our workforce and in the future, and, over the next number of weeks, in response to the Bengoa piece, I will articulate the way in which we do that. I will pick up on some of the particular issues raised about care homes and the renal unit, as well as other points.

I will start, however, by recognising, like others did, the work of the trust and its staff for their service and commitment to the delivery of high-quality health services. Like Mr Storey, who secured today's debate, I pay tribute to the hard-working staff in the hospitals and those delivering health and social care services in the community for their service to the local community and their commitment to delivering high-quality health services.

It is important to set the context for what care the Northern Trust delivers on a day-to-day basis and the environment in which it operates. The Northern Trust area has a population of just under 440,000, which is the largest resident population in the North. In common with the rest of the North, the demand for health and social care in the trust area grows annually by approximately 6%. That includes demographic growth, resulting in a higher number of older people with complex health needs and co-morbidities and in increased referrals.

In 2015-16, the trust had 44,944 people admitted to hospital care and 46,752 day cases. Every year, the trust and partners in the independent sector provide millions of hours of domiciliary care. Despite the scale of the challenges that it faces, the trust is working hard and is focused on the task in hand, which is to deliver high-quality, safe and effective care in the most efficient manner possible. However, we need to accept and acknowledge the very real pressures facing health and social care services right across the North in general terms, although those are obviously also relevant to the Northern Trust. They include a rise in chronic conditions, driven by our ageing population and unhealthy lifestyle habits; an increased demand and over-reliance on hospital services; growing expectations of our population and fast-moving opportunities in technology and medical interventions; workforce challenges; and the ongoing financial challenges.

The Northern Trust has certainly not been immune to the challenges facing the wider system, and it would be foolish to think that there are any simple solutions. However, the trust is already engaged and working with communities to develop and improve the services that it provides for patients. I welcome the positive commentary that some Members made about that ongoing piece of work. The trust used the turnaround and support team to provide a strong foundation for the five-year reform and modernisation programme, which is under way.

The model for services in the Causeway locality has a strong emphasis on integrated, locality-based community services delivered in partnership. It is a model that supports people to live independently, with home as a first choice, and outside the home being in accessible, locality-based facilities.

That model avoids hospitalisation and institutional care, and supports prompt discharge when acute intervention is needed. We should be clear that these are the services that patients need.

The trust has no plans to move away from the two acute hospital site model currently in place. Acute services are delivered from Causeway and Antrim. Those hospitals work collaboratively and network with other acute services, particularly in Belfast and the west.

Local hospitals will continue to play an important role in that network, but, at the same time, we must work to deliver services through a modern efficient network that is well placed to take advantage of the advances in medical science and patient care, which will no doubt continue to be made through the 21st century. Our people deserve no less than that.

Many Members referred to Professor Bengoa's work and the expert panel that set out to look at the current configuration of services regionally and to provide advice on a new delivery model for HSC services. In

the immediate future, I intend to bring that work to the Executive, the Health Committee and the House. As part of that work, Professor Bengoa and his colleagues engaged with all the main parties represented here, all of which contributed today, and the case for change and agreeing a vision and set of principles that would underpin reform was set out and agreed.

For us in the Chamber, it is about all of us recognising the need to transform the way in which we deliver health and social care services right across the North. We cannot keep doing things in the same way and expecting different outcomes. Ultimately, if we continue to do that, it is patients who will suffer. For me, that goes beyond trusts and hospitals: it is about the radical transformation of health and social care. We should be under no illusion whatsoever that it is absolutely necessary to safeguard our HSC for this and future generations.

I received the expert panel's report earlier in the summer and am taking my time to consider fully all its recommendations and implications. As I said, I will publish, in the immediate future, not only the panel's report but my plans for reforming the HSC.

Members mentioned a number of issues. As I said, if I have not picked up on all of them, I will read Hansard and am happy to respond in writing. The renal unit was mentioned and where we are with that. In September 2015, the Department approved the strategic outline case for the expansion of renal services. The proposal is to establish a medical-led satellite unit in the Causeway Hospital, which will provide renal services for up to 50 patients. The estimated capital cost of the project is around £3 million. The Northern Trust is developing the associated outline business case, and, following submission for approval by the Department, the project will be considered alongside other capital projects in the HSC trust's capital priorities.

In relation to the Roddens and residential care homes in North Antrim — Members will be aware of this — following confirmation that Four Seasons Health Care was proposing to close seven of its care homes, my predecessor asked the Health and Social Care Board to halt the review and the current process examining the future role and functions of residential care homes as a precautionary measure. I have now received information from the board on the outcome of the review, and I am considering it along with advice from my officials. I have yet to make a final decision on the future of statutory residential care homes, but I will ensure that the right care services are available for patients. You can be assured that that will remain a priority for me.

Mr Swann: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs O'Neill: Let me just run through the issues.

You raised the issue of Rathlin. As far as I am aware, there is 24-hour, seven days a week nursing cover on Rathlin. If there are particular concerns about Rathlin, I encourage you to contact me after the debate has concluded, and I am happy to pick that up.

It is so important that we review how we support older people. In the immediate future, I intend to look at a review of social care services and how we support older people. It is not good enough that trusts do not have enough people in-house to provide domiciliary care packages. Trusts are also having real difficulties in recruiting people from the

independent sector. During Question Time last week, I talked about some of those challenges. Domiciliary care workers are the lowest paid people in the health service. In the independent sector, they often do not get transport costs, which causes problems and takes their take-home pay even further down. We need to focus on those areas.

I will give way to the Member.

Mr Swann: With the Roddens and Pinewood, the Minister referred to the review of care homes that was started by her predecessor, and she is looking at the recommendations from that review. Is that a stand-alone review that is separate from the Bengoa report, or will it be incorporated into the Bengoa report?

Mrs O'Neill: I wonder about the expectations around the Bengoa report. He is looking at the whole system. You will remember the principles that your party also signed up to. It is about reform and the fact that we have major systems challenges in health and social care. Professor Bengoa is not looking at every individual care home or hospital site, nor is he looking at what should be done in every GP practice. He will be looking at the holistic picture of health and social care and how we need to transform it.

Professor Bengoa is not involved in where we are going with residential care homes. A big body of work has already been done in relation to that. I am considering that report from the board alongside talking to my officials. It is important that we provide clarity as soon as possible to give residents and the people who work in care homes the information that they need.

As I said, I welcome the debate, and I will pick up on any issues that Members feel I have not responded to. The one thing I would say is that transformation and reconfiguration will not be easy. It is going to require difficult decisions, and it is going to require us all to be really serious about delivering better outcomes for individuals. That is what it has to be about. It cannot be about being wedded to buildings. It has to be about how we, as an Executive, can deliver the best possible outcomes for individuals.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone): I ask the Minister to bring her remarks to a close.

Mrs O'Neill: That is what I look forward to debating time and time again, I am quite sure, with all Members. I encourage Members to contact me and talk to me about how they feel we should be transforming health and social care. We have a really good opportunity to get it right, and it is so important that we do so.

Adjourned at 5.11 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. They have not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these ministerial statements are as received at the time from the Ministers. They have not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

The Executive Office/Justice

Executive Strategy for Tackling Paramilitarism

Published at 3.00 pm on Tuesday 19 July 2016.

Ministers: We are today announcing the publication of the Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality, and Organised Crime.

A Fresh Start Agreement – The Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan was published by the Executive and the two governments on 17 November 2015. This agreement set out our proposals for addressing some of the most challenging and intractable issues that impact upon our community, including commitments to tackle paramilitarism and organised crime. Implementing A Fresh Start is a priority for the Executive, as set out in the Draft Programme for Government Framework 2016-2021.

As part of our commitments in A Fresh Start, the Executive appointed an independent Three Person Panel to report to the Executive with recommendations for a strategy for disbanding paramilitary groups. The Panel's report was published on 7 June 2016 and this action plan sets out how the Executive intends to implement these recommendations.

We believe that the Fresh Start agreement and the Panel report, along with the outcomes-based approach to cross-Executive working as represented in the draft Programme for Government, provide a unique opportunity to tackle paramilitary activity collectively as an Executive, and in an ambitious and collaborative manner.

This document sets out our strategic approach to tackling paramilitarism and organised crime. It includes a series of actions that we will take, in conjunction with local communities, in pursuit of A Fresh Start, and in response to the recommendations made by the Panel, to address the impact of criminality and paramilitarism on our society.

It recognises the multiple impacts paramilitary activity has on our society and the multi-faceted approach required to tackle it, ranging from robust action on the part of law enforcement agencies, to actions that support communities in bringing about a transition away from

paramilitarism, and addressing the socio-economic issues that can lead to individuals becoming or remaining involved in paramilitary activity.

Delivering this action plan requires recognition of the excellent work underway in communities to support and complete the transition away from paramilitarism. It will require partnership working across the Executive and with the UK and Irish Governments, law enforcement agencies, the public, private and voluntary and community sectors, and importantly, with local communities.

Implementation of this action plan will be supported by the additional £25m over five years pledged by the Executive for tackling paramilitary activity in A Fresh Start. This is match funding for an additional £25m being provided to the Executive by the UK Government.

We will meet regularly to review progress in delivering on the commitments made. Implementation will be coordinated by a Cross-Department Programme Board, chaired by the Department of Justice.

We have no doubt that this will be a challenging and ambitious programme of work but we are determined to provide the leadership necessary to address this challenge and bring about a peaceful and prosperous future for our community.

The Executive Action Plan for Tackling Paramilitary Activity, Criminality and Organised Crime is available at:

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/publications/tackling-paramilitary-activity-criminality-and-organised-crime-executive-action-plan>

1 <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/newnigov/draft-pfg-framework-2016-21.pdf>

2 <https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/newnigov/The%20Fresh%20Start%20Panel%20report%20on%20the%20disbandment%20of%20paramilitary%20groups.pdf>

Infrastructure

A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme – Making of the Vesting Orders and proceeding with the scheme

Published at 11.00 am on Wednesday 17 August 2016.

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): I wish to inform Members of my decision to proceed with the £160 million A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling scheme and the making of the necessary vesting orders.

This flagship project signals my commitment to redressing the investment deficit in the west. Members will recall the Executive's decision to secure £86.7million of capital funding for flagship projects within my Department for 2016/17. The A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme is a key priority for me and I am delighted to announce this important milestone.

I am determined to contribute towards economy growth in a regionally balanced way so I believe it is vital that infrastructure projects such as this are prioritized. This scheme is on one of five Key Transport Corridors in the north. The planned upgrade will improve the links between urban centres in Derry and Belfast.

Four Public Inquiries have been held and four Inspector's reports submitted to the Department for individual sections of the route.

The Inspectors have recommended that the planned dual carriageway should be constructed in accordance with the preferred route, with the exception of Annaghmore/Bellshill Junction, for which two of the Inquiries were specifically held to consider its arrangement.

The Inspectors made recommendations relating to accommodation works, all of which were accepted by the Department.

Part V of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 sets out the statutory requirements for the assessment of environmental impacts of road schemes. Having regard to the Environmental Statement, the Statement to Inform the Appropriate Assessment and the consultation responses to it, I am satisfied that the likely significant environmental effects of the planned scheme have been properly assessed and have been sufficient to inform judgments on the scheme. Accordingly, in light of the assessment undertaken and information presented within the Statement to Inform the Appropriate Assessment and the Environmental Statement, I accept the Department's conclusion (as the Competent Authority) that construction and operation of the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme would not by itself, or in combination with other known plans or projects, adversely affect the integrity of the Lough Neagh & Lough Beg Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, or any other Natura 2000 site. Having decided to proceed with the scheme I commit my Department to carrying out the necessary actions to facilitate the Inspector's recommendations and mitigation measures described in the Department's Statement and the Environmental Statement.

Construction of the scheme will upgrade approximately 14.7km of single carriageway to dual carriageway

standard; 7.3km between Randalstown and Toome and 7.4km between Toome and Castledawson.

The new dual carriageway will bring significant benefits for the many people who use that road every day, with reduced congestion, and improvements to both road safety and journey times, with a reduction of peak period journey times of almost 25% over the entire length of the scheme. Protecting the lives of road users is of utmost importance to me. To that end, right turn crossing movement are prohibited along the full length of the dual carriageway.

This scheme will provide a significant boost to the local economy, both in terms of trade for the area and the demand for construction materials. I am also delighted to announce that the work will be carried out by a joint venture of local firms, Grahams and Farrans.

I have asked my Department to Make the necessary Vesting Orders to facilitate construction works on the new dual carriageway to start in early autumn 2016. Indeed, the advanced ground investigation work has already commenced and archaeological investigatory works is due to commence in the coming week.

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 15 July 2016

Written Answers to Questions

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the current problems facing the pig farming sector.

(AQW 501/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I am aware of the challenging level of local pig prices and the resulting difficulties faced by pig farmers here. A similar depression in prices has been experienced across Europe, attributed to an increase in EU and global pork production combined with the effect of the Russian import ban and adverse exchange rate movements. You will be aware; these factors are outside my Department's control.

Work is ongoing at an EU level to address these issues. Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker met with Russian President Vladimir Putin on June 16 at an international economic forum in St. Petersburg, providing an opportunity to explore, amongst other things, the EU hopes for an end to the Russian ban on live pig & pigmeat exports.

A Private Storage Aid scheme was operated to tackle oversupply in the EU market and signs are that, while there is some way to go, pig prices are strengthening with EU and GB pig prices increasing. The GB price has now increased for seven straight weeks, adding nearly 4p/kg over that time, and is at its highest level since mid-January.

Furthermore, the establishment of a Meat Market Observatory, covering beef/veal and pigmeat, and to be launched before the summer, will see an additional market monitoring resource which may provide some assistance during market reversals.

Meanwhile, my Department is helping to support the pig sector through the provision of education, training and research in order to improve efficiency and sustainability. For example, dedicated College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) pig advisors provide advice and guidance to farm businesses on pig production issues, and the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) conducts research of benefit to the pig industry and provides diagnosis and advice for producers. Research includes investigations to improve pig production efficiency through management and nutritional practices, as well as to reduce the environmental impact of pig production.

Moreover, my Department continues to work to secure access to a range of third country markets for pork exports, in order to help mitigate price fluctuations and allow the pork industry to access new key priority markets.

Through the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS), there may also be opportunity for pig producers to avail of capital support in order to help improve on-farm resource and production efficiencies. It is expected that the FBIS Capital Scheme will open later in the year, subject to the necessary Department of Finance approvals.

Taken together, these measures should in the long term assist the pig farming sector.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, under Article 28 (1) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 requiring waste tyres to be removed, to detail (i) the Local Councils that have served notices; (ii) the recipients; and whether all notices were carried out.

(AQW 1616/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: This information is not held by my Department, it is held within each of the 11 local Councils.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline when she will make a decision on the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016,

(AQW 1651/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is my intention to meet with representatives of both the Northern Ireland Horse Racing Group and the Northern Ireland Turf Guardians Association, before making a decision on the Horse Racing (Charges on Bookmakers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department will support racecourses if the legislation does not come into effect in time for 2016-17 payments.

(AQW 1653/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Horse Racing Fund is used to assist the operation and development of two racecourses in Northern Ireland, Down Royal and Downpatrick. Under the Fund, payments may be made for specified costs such as the provision or supplementing of prize money, safety of spectators at meetings and the provision or improvement of services for the operation of racing.

My Department will continue to administer the Fund to meet the needs of the racecourses at the current rate of £1123 within the parameters that the legislation permits.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the number of complaints made to his Department concerning dog fouling in each of last five years, broken down by district council area.

(AQW 1708/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Responsibility for dealing with complaints made with regard to dog fouling rests with district councils, who can exercise powers under the Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 or the Litter (Northern Ireland) Order 1994. The Department does not collate statistics in respect of 'complaints' but, to give some idea of the level of enforcement activity by district councils, the table below details the number of fixed penalty notices issued for dog fouling offences across Northern Ireland between 2010/11 and 2014/15.

New Council District	Council District	Dog Fouling Number of Fixed Penalty Notices Issued				
		2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Antrim & Newtownabbey	Antrim	0	0	2	1	4
	Newtownabbey	33	17	16	24	8
Mid & East Antrim	Ballymena	2	9	6	8	6
	Carrickfergus	0	3	0	2	1
	Larne	3	2	8	6	1
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	Armagh	2	5	3	7	10
	Banbridge	0	1	3	1	3
	Craigavon	50	38	48	44	27
Belfast	Belfast	160	92	189	223	152
Causeway Coast & Glens	Ballymoney	1	0	1	1	0
	Coleraine	33	17	8	25	25
	Limavady	1	0	1	0	0
	Moyle	2	1	2	1	0
Derry City & Strabane	Derry City	1	3	1	11	10
	Strabane	2	2	7	10	4
Fermanagh & Omagh	Fermanagh	0	0	1	9	6
	Omagh	0	1	2	3	3
Mid Ulster	Cookstown	1	0	1	0	0
	Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	0	3	3	1
	Magherafelt	1	0	0	2	3
Newry, Mourne & Down	Down	10	16	9	13	19
	Newry & Mourne	5	4	4	3	11
North Down & Ards	Ards	8	13	15	5	37
	North Down	6	1	5	1	4
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Castlereagh	0	0	14	6	6
	Lisburn	2	6	15	2	0

		Dog Fouling Number of Fixed Penalty Notices Issued				
New Council District	Council District	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Totals		323	231	364	411	341

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will consider that in relation to any future match funding capital grants schemes for farmers, that additional funding allocations are included for young farmers.
(AQW 1749/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The next phase of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme to be rolled out will be the FBIS capital scheme. It is not yet possible to be specific about the exact detail of the capital support until the necessary business case approval is obtained.

I want to ensure that we are investing in our next generation of farmers, and therefore it is proposed that the FBIS capital scheme will favour young farmers at the selection stage.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline the basis of the legal advice upon which she decided that current legal proceedings prevented her from establishing the public inquiry into illegal waste disposal; and (ii) whether she publish this advice.
(AQW 1778/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In response to a question in the Assembly on 20th June 2016, I explained that the previous Executive had considered suggestions for a public inquiry into waste management and disposal arrangements in Northern Ireland, prompted by the discovery of illegal dumping at Mobuoy. However, in light of the focus on dealing with the issues through implementation of the Mills Report, concern about the undefined costs of an inquiry and ensuring that any criminal proceeding were able to take their course no agreement was reached before the end of the last mandate.

I am not aware of the specific legal advice referred to.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how legal proceedings involving a single dump site at Campsie have prevented the establishment of an inquiry into illegal dumping.
(AQW 1779/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In response to a question in the Assembly on 20th June 2016, I explained that the previous Executive had considered suggestions for a public inquiry into waste management and disposal arrangements in Northern Ireland, prompted by the discovery of illegal dumping at Mobouy. However, in light of the focus on dealing with the issues through implementation of the Mills Report, concern about the undefined costs of an inquiry and ensuring that any criminal proceeding were able to take their course no agreement was reached before the end of the last mandate.

I am not aware of the specific legal advice referred to.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans she has to provide financial support the apple growing industry in Armagh.
(AQW 1793/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My department is currently rolling out the Farm Business Improvement Scheme (FBIS), which is a package of measures aimed at knowledge transfer, innovation, cooperation and capital investment which will help support the sustainable growth of our agriculture and horticulture sectors. The early focus has been to make advice and support available to farmers to help them clearly identify their needs and make the right decisions about developing their business.

The next phase of the FBIS will be the proposed capital scheme which will include capital investment support linked to the needs in a farmer's business plan at 40 percent of eligible costs. Under the Rural Development Programme it is proposed that support would be targeted at capital investments that improve: on-farm resource and production efficiency; resilience to adverse weather events and mitigate climate change; animal and plant health and health and safety on farms.

While development of the FBIS is currently ongoing and is subject to business case approval, it is expected that there will be items of equipment contained within it that are suitable for the apple growing industry.

My department, in conjunction with the Agri-Food Biosciences Institute, also continues to fund research projects aimed at improving performance in the marketplace for the fruit and vegetable industry on an ongoing basis.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any plans she has to bring Lough Neagh into public ownership.
(AQW 1810/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A recently completed consultation exercise, facilitated by my Department, has indicated that a community led approach in the form of a development trust, represents the preferred option for the future management of Lough Neagh. To

advance this a Trust with an Interim Board has been established. The Board held its inaugural meeting on 17 June and I hope to meet with members shortly to discuss how best to build on the consultation and stakeholder engagement process that has already taken place.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future, that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for her assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or her Department. **(AQW 1821/16-21)**

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is currently completing European Union (EU) funded projects to a value of £8,448,408. This is analysed in the table below.

As the Forestry Grants funding relates to 2016-17, it is anticipated that there is no risk to that EU funding.

Given the nature of Horizon 2020 Research, this funding extends beyond 2016-17. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills provided some further clarity on such funding in a statement on 28 June 2016. This advised that: 'The referendum result has no immediate effect on those applying to or participating in Horizon 2020. UK participants can continue to apply to the programme in the usual way. The future of UK access to European science funding will be a matter for future discussions. Government is determined to ensure that the UK continues to play a leading role in European and international research'.

The other EU funded projects in the table below also extend beyond 2016-17. However as the Executive has not yet agreed any budgets beyond 2016-17, it is not possible to set out any other future projects that may receive EU funding at this stage. The implications of Brexit on EU funding in my Department will be assessed as the position evolves.

EU funded projects being completed

Funding Area	Project Description	EU Funding
Horizon 2020	EU Lead Research Projects with the promises of more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market.	£2,624,645
Business Development Groups	Knowledge transfer through Business Development Groups (BDG) scheme uses a group approach to improve the technical efficiency of farm businesses.	£3,810,000
Farm Family Key Skills	Farm family Key Skills (FFKS) is part of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme aiming to increase the levels of knowledge and skills in agricultural and commercial horticulture businesses.	£36,000
Forest Service	Funding in relation to the Woodland Creation, Woodland Restoration and Improvement Works projects.	£1,069,000
DAERA - NDPB	Research projects being completed by Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to benefit and minimise threats to the Agri-Food Industry.	£908,763
Total		£8,448,408

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail the projects (a) in progress; and (b) scheduled for the future in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by her Department, that have received EU funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) for her assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Executive Office or her Department **(AQW 1826/16-21)**

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is currently completing EU funded projects to a value of £260,500, in relation to Forest Service Woodland Schemes (£233,000) and the Horizon 2020 Scheme (£27,500) in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area.

As the Forest Service Woodland Schemes funding relates to 2016-17, it is anticipated that there is no risk to that EU funding.

Given the nature of Horizon 2020 Research, this funding extends beyond 2016-17. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills provided some further clarity on such funding in a statement on 28 June 2016. This advised that: 'The referendum result has no immediate effect on those applying to or participating in Horizon 2020. UK participants can continue to apply to the programme in the usual way. The future of UK access to European science funding will be a matter for future discussions. Government is determined to ensure that the UK continues to play a leading role in European and international research'.

As the Executive has not yet agreed any budgets beyond 2016-17, it is not possible to set out any other future projects that may receive EU funding at this stage. The implications of Brexit on EU funding in my Department will be assessed as the position evolves.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the financial plans in place to mitigate any loss of income as a result of the British exit from the European Union.

(AQW 1840/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The trading and support framework that will apply to the agricultural industry following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation and agreement within the UK, between the UK and the EU and between the UK and its other trading partners over the course of the next number of years. I can assure you that I will be fully engaged in those processes, seeking to ensure that the needs and aspirations of our local agri-food sector are properly reflected in the final arrangements. In the meantime, we continue to access the CAP support regime and the EU trading opportunities as normal.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail (i) all projects; (a) being completed; and (b) scheduled for the future; that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for her assessment whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or her Department.

(AQW 1849/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is currently completing European Union (EU) funded projects to a value of £8,448,408. This is analysed in the table below.

As the Forestry Grants funding relates to 2016-17, it is anticipated that there is no risk to that EU funding.

Given the nature of Horizon 2020 Research, this funding extends beyond 2016-17. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills provided some further clarity on such funding in a statement on 28 June 2016. This advised that: 'The referendum result has no immediate effect on those applying to or participating in Horizon 2020. UK participants can continue to apply to the programme in the usual way. The future of UK access to European science funding will be a matter for future discussions. Government is determined to ensure that the UK continues to play a leading role in European and international research'.

The other EU funded projects in the table below also extend beyond 2016-17. However as the Executive has not yet agreed any budgets beyond 2016-17, it is not possible to set out any other future projects that may receive EU funding at this stage. The implications of Brexit on EU funding in my Department will be assessed as the position evolves.

EU funded projects being completed

Funding Area	Project Description	EU Funding
Horizon 2020	EU Lead Research Projects with the promises of more breakthroughs, discoveries and world-firsts by taking great ideas from the lab to the market.	£2,624,645
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DAERA - NDPB	Research projects being completed by Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to benefit and minimise threats to the Agri-Food Industry.	£908,763
Total		£8,448,408

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the amount of funding that her Department has facilitated from European funding streams in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1851/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Over the last five years my Department has facilitated £1,497.7 from European funding streams. Of this amount, £1,476.3m related to agriculture and £21.4m related to environmental and fisheries activities. A breakdown of these amounts is provided in the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Breakdown of European Funding streams facilitated by DAERA in the last five years (all figures in £'million)

Funding Stream	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	Total
Common Agricultural Policy	258.6	300.0	317.6	285.3	314.8	1,476.3
Structural Funding	3.0	3.3	3.3	3.8	2.6	16.0

Funding Stream	2015/16	2014/15	2013/14	2012/13	2011/12	Total
Competitive Funding	2.0	1.9	0.03	0.9	0.5	5.4
Total	263.6	305.2	321.0	290.0	317.9	1,497.7

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will legislate to classify an attack on an assistance dog an aggravated offence.

(AQW 1863/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Dogs (Amendment) Act (NI) 2011 (the 2011 Act) was introduced following a review of dog control legislation here. It strengthened the Dogs (NI) Order 1983 (the Dogs Order) by introducing a number of measures including an offence of allowing a dog to attack and injure any other animal owned by another person, which includes an assistance dog. Prior to this it was not an offence to allow a dog to attack and injure an animal, excluding livestock, owned by another person.

This provision of the 2011 Act recognised the grave pain and distress an attack on a much-loved pet, or a much needed assistance dog, can inflict on its owners. It also recognised that an owner who is not responsible enough to prevent their dog attacking and injuring another person's dog may need to be forced by law to manage their animal properly before it attacks and injures a person.

The 2011 Act was introduced with the full support and approval of the Assembly and the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee. At that time the Justice Minister commented that the fines and penalties contained within the legislation were fair and proportionate.

The 2011 Act also introduced powers for Council dog wardens to impose control conditions on an owner's dog licence where a breach of the Dogs Order has occurred. These control conditions can include a requirement for the dog to be muzzled and leashed when in public, or kept away from certain specified places. Wardens can also require that a dog is neutered, or that a dog or its owner undergo training.

It is also an offence under the Dogs Order to set a dog on any other person or to allow a dog to attack another person. You may find it useful to know that under the Dogs Order the definition of attacking a person includes behaving in such a manner so as to cause a person apprehension of being attacked. Therefore if a person who relies on an assistance dog felt apprehension of being attacked the owner of the attacking dog may be guilty of this offence.

Although a dog attack on a guide dog or assistance dog is not an aggravated offence within the Dog Order, a court can, upon the prosecution proving that the act was committed, determine any aggravated factors such as any physical or psychological effect on the victim. The existing sentencing guidelines for the magistrates' courts for the offence of a dog attack on another animal currently include specific examples of possible aggravating factors, such as, a sustained or repeated attack, and the severity of the injury caused by the attack. If the court determines that there are aggravating factors this will be taken into account when sentencing and the defendant may receive a higher sentence.

You may wish to note that the welfare of all dogs, including guide dogs and assistance dogs, is also protected under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011 (the Animal Welfare Act). A person found guilty of an offence of causing unnecessary suffering is currently liable to a maximum sentence on conviction on indictment (in the Crown Court) of up to 2 years' imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine, or on summary conviction (in the magistrates' courts) of up to 6 months' imprisonment and/or a £5,000 fine.

My Department recently published the Final Report of the Review of the Implementation of the Animal Welfare Act, which recommended an increase in the maximum sentences available under it. The Animal Welfare Act will be amended by the Justice Act (NI) 2016 to give effect to these increases from 1 August 2016. The maximum penalty upon conviction on indictment will be 5 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine; and on summary conviction for the offences of causing unnecessary suffering or of animal fighting the maximum penalty will be 12 months' imprisonment and/or a £20k fine.

These increases will give Northern Ireland the toughest penalties for animal welfare offences available anywhere on these islands and send a very clear message that animal cruelty will not be tolerated.

I therefore have no immediate plans to further amend the Dogs Order at this time to make it an aggravated offence for a person's dog to attack an assistance dog.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline the future of the Rural Development Programme following the decision to leave the European Union.

(AQW 1908/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The programming period for the Rural Development Programme is 2014 -2020 however spend can continue until 2023. Although the UK have voted to leave the EU, this will not take effect until the UK Government has negotiated a withdrawal treaty with the EU. This negotiation will take a number of years to complete. It is not possible therefore to say at this stage how the Rural Development Programme budget or the programme duration will be affected.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how she plans to protect the agri-food industry following the decision to leave the European Union.

(AQW 1912/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland agri-food sector is one of the most strategically important sectors to our local economy and will be a key driver in securing economic growth going forward.

The terms of the UK withdrawal from the European Union and the trading and support framework that will apply to the agricultural industry following a UK withdrawal from the EU will be the subject of negotiation and agreement within the UK, between the UK and the EU and between the UK and its other trading partners over the next number of years. I can assure you that I will be working to ensure that the needs and aspirations of our Northern Ireland agri-food industry are properly reflected in the final arrangements.

In the meantime, the CAP support regime will continue as normal, as will our trading relationships and this guarantees a certain degree of stability while we develop new policies which will be tailored to our own local needs in the future.

I recently announced my intention to make advance payments for the Direct Payment Schemes in October 2016 and to make full payments to 95% of eligible farmers in December 2016.

Enhancing the existing markets for our high quality agri-food produce, including our important export market in GB, and securing new markets will continue to be a top priority for my department. We will continue to make the most of measures through the Rural Development Programme to help ensure that farmers are better equipped to meet the challenges ahead and take advantage of the future market opportunities.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has for the protection of the Dark Hedges.

(AQW 1951/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department does not currently have the legislative instruments to protect the Dark Hedges, beyond the protection of any wildlife which may reside within the trees and local environment on a species specific basis. On the restructuring of Local Government and the Northern Ireland Civil Service the power to implement Tree Preservation Orders under the Planning Order 1991 transferred to the Local Councils from the Planning Service.

My Department currently has no plans to further protect the Dark Hedges but my officials and I fully recognise the importance of this landscape feature and tourist destination to both the local area and the whole of Northern Ireland.

Please contact Causeway Coast and Glens District Council Local Planning Office for further information on Tree Preservation Orders within the council area.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from her Department, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1972/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: From 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2016, the Department provided £7,068,866 to voluntary and community organisations in the Newry and Armagh constituency. Details of the amounts received in each of the last 5 years and the organisations which received funding are detailed in the table below. You should note that information provided for 2015/16 has not yet been audited and may be subject to change.

Voluntary and Community Funding 2011-2016

Table 1: Funding in Newry and Armagh per Financial Year

Financial Year	Funding
2011/12	638,555
2012/13	1,715,370
2013/14	1,442,466
2014/15	2,379,147
2015/16	893,328
Total	7,068,866

Table 2: Organisations within Newry and Armagh which received Funding

Challenge Fund

- National Trust
- Friends of Derrymore
- Clanrye Group
- Mullavilly PS
- Cloughoge Nursery Unit, Cloughoge PS
- BRA, The Duke of Edinburgh Award

- St Patrick's PS Cullyhanna
- Windsor Hill Primary School
- Bunscoil an Iúir
- Alliance Youth Works
- Cloughoge Primary School and Nursery Unit
- County Armagh Wildlife Society (CAWS)
- Dromintee Primary School
- Mullaglass Primary School
- Orchard County Primary School
- Ring of Gullion and Cooley's Red squirrel group
- St Brigid's Primary School Downpatrick
- St. Joseph's P.S., Meigh
- St. Mary's P.S.
- St. Paul's High School Bessbrook

Natural Environment Fund, Natural Heritage Fund & Natural Heritage Grant

- Mourne Heritage Trust

RDP 2007-13 Woodland Creation

- National Trust @ Derrymore

Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme

- Armagh County Agricultural Show

Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme Axis 3

- Crossmaglen and South Armagh Chamber of Commerce
- Daisychain Daycare
- Enable NI
- Happy Faces Day Care Glassdrummond Ltd
- Memory Making Ltd
- Milltown Rural Development Association
- Ms. Tara Muckian
- Sticky Fingers Early Years Arts
- Markethill District Enterprise Ltd
- Newry & Mourne District Council
- Ti Chulainn Activity & Cultural Centre
- Annaghmore/Eglisish Regeneration Association
- Ballygorman School House
- Charlemont and Collegeland Community Development Association
- Corkley Development Association
- Culloville Development Association Ltd
- Culloville Development Association/Newry and Mourne District Council
- Cullyhanna Community Group
- Darkley & District Youth & Community Association
- Drumbanagher Parish Ltd
- Hamilton's Bawn Cultural Society
- Killean Playgroup
- Madden Community Centre
- Madden Schoolhouse Heritage Committee
- Milford Community Development Association
- Mullabrack Parish Hall Ltd
- Newtownhamilton Rural Community Association Ltd
- Niamh Louise Foundation
- Redrock Development Partnership
- Shane McKeown
- St Brigid's Accordion Band Jonesbrough
- St Oliver Plunkett Youth Club
- Tullysaren Community Association
- Tullyvallen Rangers FC Community Limited
- Crossmaglen Community Association
- Milltown Rural Development Association
- Cullaville Community Organisation
- Salters Grange and District Historical And Community Association

Targeting Rural Poverty and Social Isolation

- County Down Rural Community Network
- South Armagh Childcare Consortium, Cullyhanna
- Sticky Fingers Arts (Early Years Arts), Newry
- Newry & Mourne Citizens Advice Bureau
- The Brain Injury Foundation, Newry
- Aughnagurgan Rural Development Association
- Clady Tiny Tots
- Knockavannon Rural Community
- Loughgall Women's Institute
- Newtownhamilton Rural Community Association
- Out Of the Shadows, Richhill
- Poyntzpass Community Playgroup
- Tullyvallen LOL, Newtownhamilton
- Tyrone's Ditches Pipe Band, Armagh
- Ballymacnab CDA
- Camlough Community Association
- Corkley Development Association
- Craobhrua Camlocha Hurling Club, Bessbrook
- HOPE 4 ME & FIBRO NI, Bessbrook
- Jerretzpass Community Association
- Mullintur Ulster Scots
- Redrock Development Partnership
- St. Brigid's PS Parent Group, Crossmaglen
- TULLYHAPPY LOL, Markethill

Department for Communities

Mr Poots asked the Minister for Communities to outline the support available for marching bands.
(AQW 1236/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I have recently confirmed that my Department has allocated £200k in 2016/17 for the re-instatement of the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme.

The Arts Council also supports the marching bands sector through ongoing support to the Ulster-Scots Community Network (USCN). The USCN provides an umbrella support service and works to build capacity, mainly by assisting bands with fundraising, financial management and governance.

Formally constituted bands can also continue to apply to any relevant Arts Council Programme. For example, funding can be provided for suitable developmental, intergenerational and community projects. Funding streams which might be applicable include the Annual Funding Programme (which supports the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association), Lottery Project Funding or Small Grants Programme (which has recently awarded funding to a project involving four local bands). Any potential applicant may contact the Arts Council for advice in relation to the completion of application forms prior to submission.

Marching bands are also able to avail of funding support from the Ulster-Scots agency through three main strands of their Financial Assistance Scheme: (i) Music and Dance Tuition; (ii) Summer Schools; and (iii) Community Festivals. Bands have received support in all of these categories, but most often it takes the form of tuition grants.

The Ulster-Scots Agency also provides core funding of just under £300k annually to the USCN, which has 234 bands among its members. Among other things, this funds governance support, child protection / Access NI support, and help with fundraising and advocacy.

As well as providing funding for pipe bands to run their own tuition, the Ulster-Scots Agency also supports tuition in schools and through the Royal Scottish Pipe Band Association (RSPBA) and the Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School. Pupils also have the opportunity to get involved with the Ulster-Scots Agency Juvenile Pipe Band.

The Ulster-Scots Agency has worked with the RSPBA to develop foundation certificates for piping and drumming and is currently working with the Northern Ireland Piping and Drumming School to publish music textbooks.

In relation to flute bands, the USCN has developed an accredited flute qualification, and the Ulster-Scots Agency provides enhanced support for bands wishing to seek accreditation. The Agency has also provided support for the Flute Band Association's annual Own Choice Competition.

Aside from this, my Department also provides funding to the Community Festivals Fund, which is administered by Local Councils, and which has provided funding to many bands for events fitting the appropriate criteria.

In addition to financial support, research carried out in partnership with the Confederation of Ulster Bands was published in 2011. The study and associated guidance document can be found on the DfC website. The document is designed for use by policy makers, marching bands and umbrella groups who wish to develop their cultural offering. It provides information on funding and guidance on building existing strengths and encouraging new approaches to maximise opportunities for development.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Communities to outline what support his Department can provide to marching bands.
(AQW 1459/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have recently confirmed that my Department has allocated £200k in 2016/17 for the re-instatement of the Arts Council's Musical Instruments for Bands Scheme.

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Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 289/16-21, to detail the meetings that have taken place between (i) the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and (ii) his Department, with individuals or community representatives in the immediate vicinity of this memorial at which the presence of the memorial was discussed.

(AQW 1805/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have been advised that in relation to:

- (i) No meetings have taken place between the Housing Executive and individuals or community representatives in the immediate vicinity of this memorial at which the presence of the memorial was discussed. However, the Housing Executive continues to engage with the local community as part of its normal routine business; and
- (ii) No representatives from my Department have met with individuals or community representatives in the immediate vicinity of this memorial at which the presence of the memorial was discussed.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to outline the financial support available for GAA clubs.

(AQW 1906/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are a number of funding programmes currently open to which GAA Clubs could apply. These are:

- The Department for Communities, Volunteering Small Grants Programme provides support direct to frontline volunteering organisations. The programme which closes on 29 July 2016, provides funding support between £200 and £1200 to help organisations recruit and support volunteers. Details on how to apply can be found by accessing the following link: - www.lcdi.co.uk/smallgrants
- Sport NI's 'Every Body Active 2020' Programme (Strand 4) - Active Awards for Sport. This programme will provide total exchequer funding of £700k in small grants. Eligible organisations, which may include GAA Clubs, can apply for grants valued between £1,000 and £10,000. This programme closes for application on 18th July 2016. Details on how to apply can be found by accessing the following link: - www.sportni.net/funding/our-funding-programmes/active-awards/

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities what plans he has to address concerns, including the demands for demolition, of Dingwell Flats in Taghnevan.

(AQW 1982/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am aware of the issues you and other local representatives have raised regarding these flats.

I have agreed to meet with you and other local representatives very soon to discuss the issue further.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Communities how much money has been set aside to address the damp conditions in the flats of the Dales and Moynes at Seymour Hill.

(AQW 1992/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that there is no specific budget set aside for carrying out remedial works in respect of dampness or condensation. Where such works are required they are undertaken by the local maintenance contractor and funded from its response maintenance budget.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Communities what assurances he can give that the flats at the Dales and Moynes, Seymour Hill will be brought up to the required standard as a matter of urgency.

(AQW 1993/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has developed a Tower Block Strategy to determine the long term future of its tower blocks. The Dales and Moynes option appraisals are now underway and the Housing Executive plans to have the full appraisal programme completed by the end of this year.

In the meantime the Housing Executive will continue to address any issues which arise through its response maintenance service.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the total number of new build social housing in West Tyrone in each of the past five years; and (ii) whether his Department is currently planning for new build social housing in West Tyrone. (AQW 1999/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can advise that;

(i) the total number of new social housing units built over the past five years is as follows:

Year	Total completions
2011/12	28
2012/13	6
2013/14	11
2014/15	0
2015/16	16
Total	61

These include 7 Existing Satisfactory Purchases (ESP), and 23 re-improvement schemes that are consider new social housing units, details below:

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Scheme Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex	McKinley Bungalows	Clanabogan	New Build	General Needs	1	2010/11	2011/12
Apex	Iona House Phase 1	Strabane	New Build	Learning Disabilities	12	2010/11	2011/12
Apex	Plumbridge Road	Newtownstewart	New Build	General Needs	1	2010/11	2011/12
Apex	165 Victoria Rd Bready	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	1	2010/11	2011/12
Apex	5 Mullaghmore Cottages	Omagh	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2010/11	2011/12
Choice	PSNI Site Melmount Rd	Sion Mills	New Build	General Needs	6	2010/11	2011/12
Choice	Loughrey Terrace	Drumquin	New Build	General Needs	2	2010/11	2011/12
Rural	Forthill Park	Newtownstewart	New Build	Physical Disabilities	4	2010/11	2011/12
Choice	3 Dergmoney View	Omagh	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	Learning Disabilities	6	2011/12	2012/13
Choice	Ashley House Remodling Phase 2	Omagh	Re-improvement	Learning Disabilities	7	2012/13	2013/14
Choice	Ashley House Remodling Phase 3	Omagh	New Build	Learning Disabilities	4	2012/13	2013/14
Apex	Railway Court	Omagh	Re-improvement	Learning Disabilities	16	2014/15	2015/16
				Total	61		

- (ii) There are currently 3 social housing Existing Satisfactory Purchases units which will complete this year. A further 113 social housing units are planned as part of the Social Housing Development Programme 2016/17 to 2018/17. Details below:

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	12 Greeves Park	Strabane	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	Physically Disabilities	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	11 Garvan Court	Sion Mills	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Triangle	77 Linen Green	Sion Mills	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Apex	Omagh 16/17 Homeless/ Care Leavers (Woodside Avenue)	Omagh	New Build	YPLC	8	2016/17	2017/18
Habinteg	84 Bridge Street	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	4	2016/17	2017/18
Habinteg	Adria Factory, Strabane Phase 1	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	30	2016/17	2018/19
Habinteg	Newton Lane	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	25	2016/17	2018/19
Triangle	Douglas Bridge ESPs	Douglas Bridge	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	4	2016/17	2016/17
Rural	Sion Mills ESPs	Sion Mills	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Ballymagorry ESPs	Ballymagorry	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Lismore Park	Sion Mills	New Build	General Needs	4	2017/18	2018/19
Apex	Bradley Way	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	28	2018/19	2020/21
				Total	116		

Please be advised that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons e.g. relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission. Additional schemes can be added to the SHDP as part of the annual programme formulation process (housing association bidding round) or through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory/Off-the-shelf properties on an in-year basis.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1081/16-21, to detail (i) which elected representatives were spoken to; (ii) why was I not included in the discussions referred to as I have received no communication from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive despite my clear interest in the matter; (iii) why the NIHE will be consulting with the Good Relations Staff now when this should have been done prior to any decision; (iv) what was the result of the equality impact assessment; and (v) what was the view of planners in relation to this illegal memorial.

(AQW 2010/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that:-

- i) Cllr Rory McHugh contacted the West Area Manager regarding a memorial at Hillview Estate.
- ii) There was no engagement with any of the West Tyrone MLAs. The Housing Executive would be happy to arrange a meeting with you and/or all West Tyrone MLAs to discuss this issue if you believe it would be of benefit.
- iii) The memorial was built without the permission of Housing Executive and they would not have supported a memorial of this nature. The Housing Executive Good Relations Officer engaged with local community representatives to explore alternative ways to recognise the past, however these suggestions were disregarded.
- iv) An equality impact assessment is not applicable in this instance.
- v) The Housing Executive or my Department are not in a position to respond on behalf of the Planning Department.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities whether there is evidence to suggest an increase in the participation of disabled people in the arts over the last five years.

(AQW 2021/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Continuous Household Survey (CHS) provides official statistics on participation in the arts. Data collected through the CHS of adults with a disability participating in the arts is demonstrated in the table below.

Year	% adults with a disability participating in the arts
2010/11	29
2011/12	28
2012/13	26
2013/14	32
2014/15	31

In comparison to previous years for which data is available, the last five years show an increase in the participation of disabled people in the arts from percentage rates in the low twenties to rates in the high twenties to early thirties. The average participation rate over the last five years is 29%.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities how local councils have supported the increased accessibility of arts venues.
(AQW 2022/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities has no direct policy responsibility with regard to councils improving access for disabled persons. In Northern Ireland the requirement to make buildings accessible is dictated by Equality Legislation and Building Regulations.

Councils, as separate legal entities, are required by law to comply with all relevant legislation to provide equality of opportunity and protection from discrimination for people with disabilities. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 imposes a duty on employers and service providers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people to help them overcome barriers that they may face in accessing and using goods and services. In relation to the provision of accessible facilities for people with disabilities, councils are required to comply under section 21B and section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006

The Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006 also places a duty on the Equality Commission to enforce the requirement of councils to have due regard to their statutory obligations under section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and, as such, it provides a monitoring role. To comply with these obligations councils are required to have Disability Action Plans. These are a statement of a council's commitment to the promotion of equality of opportunity for disabled people and complement Equality Schemes required under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

In addition councils are responsible for Development management, determining the vast majority of planning applications for districts. All planning applications submitted to a council would be required to comply with relevant planning policies and legislation concerning accessibility.

Mrs Long asked the Minister for Communities how many arts venues have received the Arts and Disability Equality Charter plaque.

(AQW 2023/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Arts and Disability Equality Charter Plaque of Excellence has been awarded to Strule Arts Centre in Omagh. A total of seven venues have received Charter Awards namely, Alley Theatre, Strabane; Waterfront Hall, Belfast; Burnavon Arts & Cultural Centre, Cookstown; Grand Opera House, Belfast; Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Ulster Hall, Belfast and Theatre at the Mill, Newtownabbey.

The Charter Certificate is held by Island Arts Centre, Lisburn. Eight venues hold Commencement Certificates. These are Braid, Ballymena; Cultúrlann McAdam Ó Fiach, Belfast; Golden Thread Gallery, Belfast; MAC, Belfast; Millennium Forum, Londonderry; Play Resource Warehouse, Belfast; An Gaelaras, Londonderry and Sion Mills Stables, Sion Mills.

Mr Kelly asked the Minister for Communities to detail the social housing development programme new-builds in the Glengormley and Greater North Belfast area in the current comprehensive spending review period.

(AQW 2137/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is currently one new build social housing scheme programmed for Glengormley. This is at the former Tesco site on Carnmoney Road where 56 units of new social housing are planned, to start on-site during the current financial year (2016/17).

In the North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency there have been 82 social housing units recorded as complete to-date in 2016/17.

Social housing units recorded as complete in the North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency in 2016/17

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Girdwood Site	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	60	2013/14	2016/17
Apex Housing	Kinnaird Terrace	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	15	2013/14	2016/17
Fold	Torrens Playpark (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	4	2015/16	2016/17
Fold	Torrens Playpark (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2015/16	2016/17
Helm Housing	49 Mournebeg Drive	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
North Belfast HA	160 Brompton Park	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17

A further 877 social housing units are programmed to start on-site as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2016/17 to 2018/19. Details of these schemes are in the tables below.

Social housing schemes recorded as starts but not completed (under construction) in the North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Clanmil	Felden Surplus Site	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	53	2012/13	2016/17
Clanmil	Felden Surplus Site	Newtownabbey	New Build	Physical Disabilities	2	2012/13	2016/17
Apex Housing	Alexandra Park Avenue	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	37	2013/14	2017/18
Apex Housing	Alexandra Park Avenue	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2013/14	2017/18
Apex Housing	PSNI North Queen Street	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	26	2014/15	2016/17
Apex Housing	118-120 Antrim Road	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	3	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	79-83 Antrim Rd/ Bellevue Pk	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	4	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	Deerfin Pk/ Derrycoole Way Rathcoole Ph1 (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	3	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	Deerfin Pk/ Derrycoole Way Rathcoole Ph1 (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	Active Elderly	8	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	Deerfin Pk/ Derrycoole Way Rathcoole Ph1 (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2014/15	2016/17
Helm Housing	Deerfin Pk/ Derrycoole Way Rathcoole Ph2 (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	18	2014/15	2016/17

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Oaklee/Trinity	Ainsworth Community Centre (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	6	2014/15	2016/17
Oaklee/Trinity	Oldpark Road	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	7	2014/15	2016/17
Oaklee/Trinity	Oldpark Road	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2014/15	2016/17
Apex Housing	Iniscarn Way, Rathcoole (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	4	2015/16	2018/19
Apex Housing	Iniscarn Way, Rathcoole (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	Physical Disabilities	2	2015/16	2018/19
Apex Housing	Loughmoney Park, Rathcoole (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	8	2015/16	2018/19
Apex Housing	Derrycoole Park (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	24	2015/16	2018/19
Apex Housing	Derrycoole Park (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2015/16	2018/19
Apex Housing	12 Loughview Terrace (Transfer)	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Apex Housing	24 Innisfayle Gardens	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Apex Housing	64 Joanmount Gardens	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Apex Housing	9 Jamaica Street	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Apex Housing	Upper New Lodge Phase 1 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	23	2015/16	2017/18
Apex Housing	Upper New Lodge Phase 1 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	Active Elderly	8	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Clearwater, Brookhill Avenue	Belfast	New Build	Mental Health	22	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Carrs Glen, Ballysillan Park	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	9	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Carrs Glen, Ballysillan Park	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	3	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	Northern Trust Mental Health Resettlement, Abbots Road, Newtownabbey	Newtownabbey	New Build	Mental Health	24	2015/16	2017/18
Choice	24-54 Fortwilliam Parade (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	8	2015/16	2016/17
Choice	24-54 Fortwilliam Parade (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2015/16	2016/17
Choice	70 Salisbury Avenue	Belfast	Re-improvement	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Clanmil	Glenbryn Park	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	12	2015/16	2017/18
Clanmil	336-344 Oldpark Road	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	22	2015/16	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Connswater	52 Kings Road	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Connswater	148 Doagh Road	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Connswater	40 Braden Heights	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Connswater	12 Dunaney Avenue	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Connswater	9 Dunaney Avenue	Newtownabbey	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Helm Housing	16 Linen Lofts	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Newington/ Apex Housing	46 Brucevale Park	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Newington/ Apex Housing	3 Edlingham Street	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Newington/ Apex Housing	216 Hillman Street	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2015/16	2016/17
Newington/ Choice	Parkside URA Phase 2 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	15	2015/16	2017/18
Newington/ Choice	Parkside URA Phase 2 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	Physical Disabilities	1	2015/16	2017/18
North Belfast HA	25 Cliftonville Avenue	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	3	2015/16	2016/17
North Belfast HA	29 Hopefield Avenue	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	3	2015/16	2016/17
North Belfast HA	5 Ballymoney Street	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2016/17	2017/18

Social housing schemes programmed to start in the North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency as part of the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2016/17 – 2018/19 at 4th July 2016

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Grays Lane, 792 Shore Road (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	6	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Halliday's Road (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	6	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	35a-41 Glenbank Place	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	6	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Existing Satisfactory Purchases	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2016/17	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Choice	Tynedale Gardens (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	4	2016/17	2017/18
Clanmil	Gainsborough Phase 3	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	10	2016/17	2017/18
Clanmil	Former Tesco Site, Carnmoney Road	Glengormley	New Build	General Needs	56	2016/17	2019/20
Habinteg	54-60 Whitewell Road	Belfast	New Build	Active Elderly	10	2016/17	2017/18
Habinteg	Buy Backs (Belfast/ Greater Belfast)	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	15	2016/17	2017/18
Helm Housing	192-196 Cavehill Road	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	11	2016/17	2017/18
Helm Housing	Old Irish Highway (Transfer)	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	18	2016/17	2018/19
Newington/ Apex Housing	50 Victoria Parade	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17
Newington/ Apex Housing	5 Little Georges Street	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17
Newington/ Apex Housing	23 & 25 Wyndham Street	Belfast	Off-the-Shelf	General Needs	2	2016/17	2016/17
North Belfast HA	92-98 Alliance Avenue	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	12	2016/17	2018/19
North Belfast HA	1 Hopefield Avenue	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	9	2016/17	2018/19
North Belfast HA	Acquisitions Phase 14	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2016/17	2016/17
North Belfast HA	1 Kerrera Street	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17
South Ulster	1-3 Eia Street	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	12	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Rathmullan Drive (Transfer)	Rathcoole	New Build	Active Elderly	20	2017/18	2018/19
Apex Housing	Upper New Lodge Phase 2 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	48	2017/18	2019/20
Apex Housing	Existing Satisfactory Purchases	Belfast	Rehabilitation	General Needs	10	2017/18	2018/19
Choice	Deerpark Road	Belfast	New Build	Vulnerable Women	24	2017/18	2018/19
Habinteg	Buy Backs (Belfast/ Greater Belfast)	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2017/18	2018/19
North Belfast HA	10 Oldpark Terrace	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	13	2017/18	2018/19
North Belfast HA	11/13 Gracehill Court	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	16	2017/18	2018/19
North Belfast HA	GAA Site, Flax Street	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	12	2017/18	2018/19

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	Willowbrook, 401 Shore Road	Newtownabbey	New Build	General Needs	50	2018/19	2021/22
Apex Housing	Limestone Road (Transfer)	Belfast	Re-improvement	General Needs	14	2018/19	2019/20
Apex Housing	Existing Satisfactory Purchases Belfast	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20
Apex Housing	Land adjacent to 27 Wyndham Street	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	2	2018/19	2019/20
Apex Housing	Upper New Lodge Phase 3 (Transfer)	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20
Habinteg	Buy Backs (Belfast/ Greater Belfast)	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20
North Belfast HA	Brookfield Mill Phase 2, Crumlin Road	Belfast	New Build	General Needs	30	2018/19	2020/21
North Belfast HA	Acquisitions Phase 16	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20
North Belfast HA	Acquisitions Phase 17	Belfast	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20

Mr Kelly asked the Minister for Communities how many inquest papers and internment papers he has released since May 2016 under (i) Freedom Of Information (FOI); and (ii) non-FOI requests.

(AQW 2138/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am currently considering the details of a number of requests and these will be completed in the near future.

As a result, I have not released any inquest or internment papers either under Freedom of Information or non-FOI requests to date.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to outline the potential for Banbridge town centre to receive a public realm scheme.

(AQW 2141/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is working closely with Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council officials to take forward a further public realm scheme in Banbridge town centre. The scheme is known as the Banbridge Linkages and is identified in the Banbridge Masterplan (2016). It is proposed that it will include the Downshire Bridge, Scarva Street, Linenhall Street and number of alleyways. The proposal is likely to involve the installation of new paving and kerbs, street lighting, some street furniture and improved drainage. The design will follow on from the recently completed scheme on Rathfriland Street / Gospel Lane and will complement the improvements already delivered.

Work has commenced on the appointment of an Integrated Consultancy Team who will design the public realm scheme and prepare an economic appraisal for consideration by the Department.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to provide a copy of his departmental bid in the June monitoring round for (i) Capital DEL; and (ii) Resource DEL.

(AQW 2147/16-21)

Mr Givan: The changes in the composition of the Executive, has led to a different approach to in-year monitoring. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis. This has replaced the previous 'bidding' process and will allow for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Communities to detail all proposed builds for social housing in East Londonderry.

(AQW 2150/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are 144 social housing units currently under construction in East Londonderry Parliamentary Constituency, with a further 217 units programmed as part of the Social Housing Development Programme 2016/17 to 2018/19. Scheme details are as follows:

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Apex Housing	2 Ashbourne Park	Coleraine	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17
Habinteg	76 Coleraine Road	Portrush	Rehabilitation	General Needs	1	2016/17	2016/17
Habinteg	Girona Avenue	Portrush	New Build	General Needs	10	2016/17	2017/18
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2016/17	2016/17
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2016/17	2017/18
Apex Housing	Chapelfield, Laurelhill Road	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	18	2017/18	2018/19
Fold	Coleraine Road	Portstewart	New Build	General Needs	85	2017/18	2020/21
Fold	Beresford Place	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	26	2017/18	2019/20
Housing Association	Scheme Name	Location	Type	Need Group	Units	Onsite Year	Completion Year
Helm Housing	Ramore Hall, Ramore Street	Portrush	New Build	General Needs	8	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Artikelly	Limavady	New Build	General Needs	6	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Harpurs Hill, Phase 2 (Transfer)	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	9	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portstewart	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2017/18	2018/19
Helm Housing	1-5 Portrush Road	Coleraine	New Build	General Needs	8	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Coleraine ESPs	Coleraine	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	5	2018/19	2019/20
Triangle	Portstewart/Portrush ESPs	Portrush	Existing Satisfactory Purchase	General Needs	10	2018/19	2019/20

Please be advised that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons eg relating to delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure Planning Permission. Additional schemes can be added to the SHDP as part of the annual programme formulation process (housing association bidding round) or through the purchase of Existing Satisfactory / Off-the-shelf properties on an in-year basis.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from his Department; broken down by year for each of the last five years.
(AQW 2161/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table attached sets out the details of grant funding provided to organisations and community & voluntary groups in Newry and Armagh over the last five years, set out mainly by individual grant programme.

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Regional Development Office – Neighbourhood Renewal – Capital						
Armagh AC&DC Callan Street Civic Pride - The Lump	£0.00	£51,268.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£51,268.00
Armagh NIHE Callan Street Community House Refurbishment	£0.00	£72,769.10	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£72,769.10
Armagh AC&DC Milford Allotments	£0.00	£25,100.84	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£25,100.84
Armagh SELB Christian brothers PS Family Learning Room & Play Facility	£0.00	£0.00	£309,050.54	£0.00	£0.00	£309,050.54
Armagh SELB Mount St Catherines Out of School Hours Facilities	£0.00	£0.00	£42,628.00	£0.00	£0.00	£42,628.00
Armagh Druid's Villas Car Parking	£79,578.63	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£79,578.63
Armagh NIHE Drumbreda Additional Car Parking	£12,213.92	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£12,213.92
Armagh NIHE Culdee Crescent Improved Car Parking Facilities	£0.00	£0.00	£33,050.00	£0.00	£0.00	£33,050.00
Armagh SELB Colaiste Caitriona Numeracy enhancing Project	£0.00	£0.00	£18,036.20	£0.00	£0.00	£18,036.20
Armagh AC&DC Friary Road Civic Pride Scheme	£0.00	£0.00	£3,952.00	£28,387.89	£26,332.94	£58,672.83
NMDDC – St Colman's College - Sports Dev Project	£302,641.16	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£102,641.16
NIHE – Greater Linenhall Arch Refurbishment	£0.00	£51,868.43	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£51,868.43
DRD – Roads Newry - Environmental Improvements Raodways and Footpaths	£153,978.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£153,978.00
SELB EASR – St Josephs HS refurb	£111,531.28	£281,176.02	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£392,707.30
Bosco GAA - Social Club Refurbishment	£24,094.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£24,094.00
NMDC – Derrybeg Community Centre - Modular Building	£0.00	£188,386.22	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£188,386.22
NMDDC – Community Facilities Refurbishment	£0.00	£29,950.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£29,950.00
EASR – St Josephs Electronic Fingerprint System	£0.00	£17,380.06	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£17,380.06

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
NMDDC – Maritime Project	£0.00	£0.00	£66,180.85	£0.00	£0.00	£66,180.85
EASR – St John Bosco Boxing Club Equipment	£0.00	£27,430.35	£640.82	£0.00	£0.00	£28,071.17
EASR – Abbey PS Play Equipment	£0.00	£19,268.40	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£19,268.40
SELB -St Marys Biometric Electronic Fingerprint System	£0.00	£0.00	£27,820.49	£0.00	£0.00	£27,820.49
NMDDC – Community Celebration Anniversary events	£0.00	£11,849.54	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£11,849.54
SELB – Magnet YC - Purchase of Annex	£0.00	£0.00	£37,961.00	£0.00	£0.00	£37,961.00
NMDDC – Barcroft Feasibility Study	£0.00	£0.00	£8,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£8,000.00
NMDDC – Threeways/ Derrybeg Beacons	£0.00	£0.00	£6,600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£6,600.00
Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency - WIN Business Park Refurbishment	£0.00	£0.00	£391,602.31	£0.00	£0.00	£391,602.31
NMDDC – Carnagat Kickabout	£0.00	£0.00	£86,550.97	£0.00	£0.00	£86,550.97
NMDDC – Community Houses IT Project	£0.00	£0.00	£15,526.00	£0.00	£0.00	£15,526.00
NM&DDC - St John Bosco GAA club New Pavilion	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£439,364.61	£439,364.61
SELB – Magnet YAC Equipment	£0.00	£0.00	£22,878.95	£0.00	£0.00	£22,878.95
	£684,036.99	£776,446.96	£1,070,478.13	£28,387.89	£465,697.55	£2,825,047.52
Neighbourhood Renewal – Revenue						
Armagh Council Technical Assistance	£44,090.00	£45,350.00	£45,980.00	£37,219.82	£34,632.87	£207,272.69
Armagh Council Growing Communities Programme	£9,000.00	£116,279.00	£96,610.68	£120,670.32	£105,554.44	£448,114.44
Armagh SELB (Education Authority) Social Renewal Education programme	£114,300.00	£117,400.00	£79,709.00	£89,945.40	£81,217.84	£482,572.24
Armagh SELB (Education Authority) Count Read Succeed Programme	£0.00	£0.00	£45,000.00	£21,420.00	£66,145.91	£132,565.91
Armagh Southern Regional College STEPS Project	£0.00	£0.00	£43,646.66	£99,187.00	£67,924.67	£210,758.33
Armagh Southern Regional college Training & Employment Opportunities (TOPS)	£25,000.00	£65,664.09	£45,602.46	£0.00	£0.00	£136,266.55

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Southern Region The Enterprise Firm (Armagh Element)	£0.00	£4,586.96	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£4,586.96
Southern Region SRC Care 4U Project (Armagh Element)	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£7,582.98	£1,784.00	£9,366.98
Southern Region SRC Oceans Programme	£0.00	£0.00	£2,531.91	£11,225.72	£8,591.93	£22,349.56
Southern Region SRC Ready to Roll on the Road (Armagh Element)	£0.00	£7,509.99	£35,858.50	£0.00	£0.00	£43,368.49
Southern Region SRC Cancer Wise (Armagh Element)	£0.00	£10,327.20	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£10,327.20
Southern Region SRC Practice Firms (Armagh Element)	£7,826.55	£19,313.87	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£27,140.42
Armagh NIHE SPRING Community House Refurbishment	£68,300.00	£2,721.81	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£71,021.81
Armagh NIHE Fencing at Mullacreevie Park	£15,683.85	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£15,683.85
Armagh AC&DC Sustaining & Building Sporting Confidence	£38,670.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£38,670.00
Armagh AC&DC Men's Shed	£18,814.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£18,814.00
Armagh SRC Building your path to success	£37,900.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£37,900.00
Armagh NIHE Callanbridge Alley Gating	£42,229.36	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£42,229.36
NMDDC – CCG Community Renewal Running Costs	£105,417.74	£100,568.17	£82,670.46	£83,481.15	£89,306.93	£461,444.45
SRC-TOPS	£21,761.71	£65,945.04	£54,456.53	£7,571.94	£66,051.38	£215,786.60
SHSCT – Health & Social Wellbeing	£51,145.09	£72,220.49	£63,884.63	£84,998.05	£66,247.43	£338,495.69
SELB – Education Programme 2011	£65,788.37	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£65,788.37
SELB – Social Renewal Education	£78,680.05	£114,584.88	£120,364.82	£129,321.66	£106,830.57	£549,781.98
NMDDC – Technical Assistance	£37,297.62	£47,624.45	£55,716.20	£49,759.26	£43,695.11	£234,092.64
SRC - Cancerwise	£609.00	£12,300.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£12,909.00
SRC – Practice Firms Newry	£17,530.00	£14,310.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£31,840.00
SRC – Enterprise Firms	£0.00	£9,173.93	£17,400.00	£17,400.00	£0.00	£43,973.93
Community Restorative Justice Newry/Armagh – Safer Stronger Communities	£0.00	£32,912.47	£51,624.15	£50,757.96	£51,416.94	£186,711.52

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Newry and Mourne Enterprise Agency Education2Employment	£0.00	£14,814.02	£42,339.99	£42,507.05	£42,107.65	£141,768.71
SELB – Enhancement of out of schools learning	£117,065.13	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£117,065.13
SRC – Ready to Roll on the Road	£0.00	£17,393.80	£36,432.60	£0.00	£0.00	£53,826.40
NMDDC – Outdoor Education programme	£0.00	£18,166.09	£21,460.54	£39,832.71	£39,405.17	£118,864.51
SELB – Count Read Succeed	£0.00	£0.00	£53,810.00	£58,350.09	£66,498.80	£178,658.89
Newry - SRC - OCEANS 14	£0.00	£0.00	£13,600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£13,600.00
Total	£917,108.47	£909,166.26	£1,008,699.13	£951,231.11	£937,411.64	£4,723,616.61
Areas At Risk						
SELB St Joseph's High School Biometric scanner	£0.00	£19,854.00	£1,985.00	£0.00	£0.00	£21,839.00
NMDDC Refurbishment of community centre	£0.00	£0.00	£12,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£12,000.00
NMDDC Community Training	£0.00	£0.00	£15,702.00	£1,314.00	£30,002.30	£47,018.30
SELB Play Area	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£40,581.55	£0.00	£40,581.55
SELB Youth Centre Refurbishment	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£51,729.10	£0.00	£51,729.10
SELB St Pauls High School	£0.00	£0.00	£29,187.16	£0.00	£0.00	£29,187.16
SELB Bessbrook Primary Schools	£0.00	£0.00	£35,807.22	£0.00	£0.00	£35,807.22
NMDDC Playpark	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£45,000.00	£0.00	£45,000.00
NMDDC Community Training	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£30,000.00	£30,000.00
	£0.00	£19,854.00	£94,681.38	£138,624.65	£60,002.30	£313,162.33
Regional Sporting Facilities Pilot Programme						
Dromintee GAC	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£50,500.00	£199,108.97	£249,608.97
Kilcluney Management & Development Committee	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£477,439.52	£477,439.52
	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£50,500.00	£676,548.49	£727,048.49
Voluntary and Community Division						
Altnaveigh House	£62,354.00	£5,196.17	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£67,550.17
Apple Blossom 50+ Club	£650.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£650.00
Armagh Beekeepers Association	£0.00	£750.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£750.00
Armagh Pipers Club	£0.00	£880.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£880.00
Armagh Widows Association	£650.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£650.00
Armagh Young at Heart	£650.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£650.00
Banbridge Special Olympics	£675.00	£400.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,075.00

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Barcroft Community Association	£600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£600.00
Barrack Hill & Gough Avenue Residents Assoc	£1,070.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,070.00
Cairde Teo	£0.00	£0.00	£633.00	£0.00	£0.00	£633.00
Coach House Regeneration Limited	£650.00	£1,200.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£2,350.00
Community Restorative Justice Newry/Armagh	£1,000.00	£250.00		£0.00	£0.00	£1,250.00
Confederation of Community Groups Newry & Mourne	£66,539.00	£66,539.00	£66,539.00	£66,539.00	£63,212.05	£329,368.05
Corkley Development Association	£650.00	£750.00		£0.00	£0.00	£1,400.00
County Armagh Community Development		£35,565.89	£71,000.00	£71,000.00	£67,450.00	£245,015.89
Craigavon & Banbridge Home Accident Prevention Group	£600.00	£450.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,050.00
Creggan Hall Management Committee	£600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£600.00
Doula-Vision Northern Ireland	£1,000.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,250.00
Drumsollen Womens Institute	£283.00	£280.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£563.00
East Armagh Forum	£0.00	£800.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£800.00
Jonesborough Luncheon Club	£0.00	£827.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£827.00
Lisdrum Youth Football Club	£1,000.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,250.00
Loughgall Football Club	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00
MATT (Men About The Town)	£1,000.00	£450.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,450.00
Media Ireland	£600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£600.00
Meigh Young at Heart		£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£250.00
Memory Making Ltd	£650.00	£760.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,910.00
Menaware	£1,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,000.00
Milford Buildings Preservation Trust	£650.00	£800.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,950.00
MS Society Newry, Mourne & Armagh Branch MS Society	£600.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£850.00
Newry & Mourne Carers Limited	£600.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£600.00
Newry and Portadown Branch of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland		£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00
Portadown ME Support Group	£600.00	£450.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,050.00

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Redrock Development Partnership (Tuesday Club)	£650.00	£800.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,450.00
Samaritans Newry	£400.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£400.00
Shopmobility Newry	£1,000.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,500.00
South Armagh Visually Impaired Club		£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£250.00
St Brigids Accordion Band	£1,000.00	£450.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,450.00
St Patrick's GAC	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00
TAG (The Active Group)	£1,000.00	£827.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,827.00
Tandragee Rovers FC	£1,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,000.00
Tanglewood Music	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00
The Brain Injury Foundation	£0.00	£500.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£500.00
Tyrone Ditches Pipe Band	£650.00	£250.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£900.00
Ulster Council Gaelic Athletic Association	£57,753.28	£58,449.52	£58,699.52	£58,699.52	£58,454.24	£292,056.08
Weast Chernobyl	£1,000.00	£450.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,450.00
Total	£209,124.28	£180,324.58	£199,871.52	£196,238.52	£189,116.29	£974,675.19
Community Cohesion Group (previously DCAL) - Resource						
Ulster Scots Agency	£59,555.00	£68,952.00	£50,985.00	£77,645.00	£50,924.00	£308,061.00
Foras Na Gaelige	£18,300.00	£49,311.00	£91,333.00	£74,370.00	£149,213.00	£382,527.00
Armagh Observatory & Planetarium	£1,565,000.00	£1,569,000.00	£1,639,000.00	£1,542,872.00	£1,223,000.00	£7,538,872.00
DCAL IW	£19,863.00	£115.00	£14,297.00	£17,182.00	£0.00	£51,457.00
NIMC	£4,351.00	£2,288.00	£6,887.00	£20,428.00	£6,941.00	£40,895.00
NI Screen	£134,623.00	£170,302.00	£317,792.00	£213,330.00	£208,330.00	£1,044,377.00
ACNI	£123,216.00	£6,564.00	£38,119.00	£18,700.00	£495,610.00	£682,209.00
Libraries NI	£1,298,300.00	£1,027,835.00	£1,042,964.00	£999,970.00	£938,591.00	£5,307,660.00
Creative Industries	£24,175.00	£50,786.00	£5,000.00	£5,000.00	£2,500.00	£87,461.00
National Museums NI	£229,572.00	£268,032.00	£248,294.00	£243,600.00	£0.00	£989,498.00
Sport NI	£267,945.00	£197,925.00	£163,553.00	£69,469.00	£32,345.00	£731,237.00
Languages & Waterways	£0.00	£37,500.00	£37,500.00	£39,500.00	£0.00	£114,500.00
Arts	£0.00	£0.00	£100,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£100,000.00
Liofa	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£1,868.00	£1,868.00
PETPSE	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£3,300.00	£3,300.00
Total	£3,744,900.00	£3,448,610.00	£3,755,724.00	£3,322,066.00	£3,112,622.00	£7,383,922.00
Community Cohesion Group (previously DCAL) - Capital						
ACNI	£9,802.00	£19,818.00	£31,646.00	£17,165.00	£0.00	£78,431.00
Armagh Observatory & Planetarium	£103,500.00	£208,000.00	£125,000.00	£180,000.00	£39,000.00	£655,500.00
National Museums NI	£0.00	£10,000.00	£5,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£15,000.00
Libraries NI	£329,192.00	£6,000.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£335,192.00

Applicant	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	Total Spend
Sport NI	£699,702.00	£183,270.00	£592,736.00	£144,097.00	£12,245.00	£1,632,050.00
DCAL IW	£0.00	£0.00	£18,535.00	£0.00	£0.00	£18,535.00
Stadia Branch	£0.00	£241,617.00	£98,749.00	£67,116.00	£0.00	£407,482.00
Arts	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£49,385.00	£0.00	£49,385.00
Capital Portfolio Branch	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	£750,000.00	£750,000.00
Total	£1,142,196.00	£668,705.00	£871,666.00	£457,763.00	£801,245.00	£3,941,575.00

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number and property type of homes that are heated by electricity as a primary or secondary source, broken down by electoral ward.

(AQW 2168/16-21)

Mr Givan: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive has advised that the details of properties which are heated by electricity as a secondary heat source are not readily available.

However, the Housing Executive currently has 4,325 properties that are heated by electricity as the primary heat source. The property types by electoral ward are shown in the table below.

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Abbey	0	6	0	10	0	0
Aghagallon	0	1	0	0	0	0
Andersonstown	0	1	0	5	2	0
Antrim Centre	0	1	0	3	0	1
Ardoyne	0	0	0	1	0	0
Atlantic	0	1	0	45	3	0
Augher & Clogher	0	0	0	9	0	0
Ballee & Harryville	0	14	0	12	2	0
Ballinderry	0	2	0	0	0	0
Ballybay	0	10	0	16	1	0
Ballybot	0	0	0	4	2	0
Ballycarry & Glynn	0	1	0	0	1	0
Ballyclare East	0	1	0	6	1	1
Ballyclare West	0	2	0	7	0	0
Ballyduff	0	1	0	2	0	0
Ballygawley	0	3	0	0	0	0
Ballygomartin	0	0	0	3	6	0
Ballygrainey	0	8	0	14	0	0
Ballyhanwood	0	4	0	0	0	0
Ballyholme	0	0	0	4	2	0
Ballykeel	0	0	0	17	4	5
Ballymacarrett	0	0	0	19	0	0
Ballymacash	0	0	0	1	0	0
Ballymacoss	0	6	0	10	0	0
Ballymoney East	0	1	0	6	0	0
Ballymoney North	0	2	0	22	1	0
Ballymoney South	0	4	0	3	1	0
Ballymurphy	0	1	0	0	0	0

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Ballynahinch	0	8	0	46	1	8
Ballysaggart	0	0	0	8	0	0
Ballysillan	0	0	0	0	3	0
Ballywalter	0	5	0	3	1	0
Banbridge North	0	5	0	4	0	0
Banbridge South	0	4	0	1	0	0
Banbridge West	0	1	0	6	0	2
Beechill	0	5	0	3	0	0
Beechmount	0	0	0	0	1	0
Beersbridge	0	0	0	20	0	0
Bellaghy	0	1	0	0	0	0
Bellevue	0	2	0	9	1	0
Belmont	1	1	0	1	1	0
Belvoir	11	18	0	34	2	20
Bessbrook	0	2	0	0	0	0
Blackstaff	0	1	0	5	3	0
Blaris	0	0	0	2	0	0
Bloomfield	0	0	0	1	3	0
Brandywell	0	0	0	4	2	0
Broughshane	0	0	0	4	0	0
Brownlow	0	0	0	10	0	1
Burnthill	0	0	0	1	3	0
Cairncastle	0	0	0	3	0	0
Camowen	0	1	0	2	0	0
Carn Hill	0	0	0	1	0	0
Carnlough & Glenarm	0	0	0	4	0	0
Carnmoney Hill	0	2	0	2	0	0
Carrowdore	0	1	0	4	0	0
Carrowreagh	0	0	0	11	3	0
Carryduff East	0	12	0	5	0	0
Castle	0	7	0	9	0	0
Castle Demesne	0	4	0	5	4	0
Castlecaulfield	0	0	0	2	0	0
Castlecoole	0	5	0	1	0	0
Castledawson	0	0	0	0	1	0
Castlerock	0	1	0	4	0	0
Castlewellan	0	0	0	2	0	0
Cathedral	0	15	0	70	1	2
Cavehill	0	0	0	1	0	0
Central	0	1	0	4	2	0
Chichester Park	0	0	0	2	1	9

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Churchland	0	0	0	4	0	0
City Walls	0	0	0	5	2	1
Clandeboye	0	4	0	6	1	0
Cliftonville	0	10	0	0	1	0
Clonard	0	2	0	1	0	0
Clondermot	0	4	0	0	0	0
Coalisland South	0	1	0	0	0	0
Collin Glen	2	0	0	64	0	27
Comber North	0	13	0	3	0	0
Connswater	0	0	0	1	2	0
Conway Square	0	1	0	17	1	0
Cookstown East	0	0	0	15	0	8
Cookstown South	0	1	0	0	0	0
Cookstown West	0	0	0	1	0	0
Coolessan	0	4	0	6	0	0
Coolnagard	0	0	0	2	0	1
Corcrair	0	8	0	0	1	2
Craigavon Centre	0	3	0	0	1	0
Craigyhill	0	0	0	2	1	0
Cregagh	14	2	0	194	8	0
Creggan South	0	0	0	1	0	0
Crossgar & Killyleagh	0	2	0	25	0	0
Crumlin	0	0	0	2	0	0
Cullybackey	0	0	0	0	1	0
Curran & Inver	0	2	0	95	0	2
Damolly	0	1	0	2	0	0
Demesne	0	7	0	0	1	0
Derryaghy	0	4	0	180	0	0
Derryboy	0	0	0	10	0	0
Doagh	0	0	0	0	2	0
Donaghadee	0	0	0	6	0	0
Donard	0	0	0	5	0	16
Dromore	0	0	0	4	1	0
Drumahoe	0	1	0	0	0	0
Drumalane	0	1	0	0	2	0
Drumbo	0	2	0	0	0	0
Drumnakilly	0	1	0	0	0	0
Duncairn	0	0	0	12	4	0
Dundrum	0	2	0	2	0	0
Dunmurry	0	0	0	1	0	0
Ebrington	0	0	0	18	0	2

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Eglinton	0	2	0	0	0	0
Enagh	0	0	0	0	2	0
Enler	0	10	0	13	4	0
Erne	3	0	0	21	0	21
Fair Green	1	1	0	16	6	0
Falls	17	0	0	71	3	0
Finaghy	0	0	0	5	0	0
Fivemiletown	0	2	0	0	0	0
Forth River	0	0	0	2	5	0
Fortwilliam	0	0	0	5	1	0
Fountain Hill	0	1	0	0	0	0
Galgorm	0	1	0	1	0	0
Galliagh	0	5	0	0	0	0
Garnerville	0	0	0	4	0	0
Garvagh	0	2	0	5	0	0
Giant's Causeway	0	0	0	1	0	0
Gilford	0	1	0	1	2	0
Gilnahirk	2	0	0	19	2	0
Glebe	0	2	0	13	0	0
Glen	0	1	0	0	1	0
Glengormley	0	0	0	2	0	0
Glenwhirry	0	0	0	0	2	0
Gortalee	0	0	0	5	1	1
Gortin	0	0	0	0	1	0
Gortrush	0	0	0	2	0	0
Graham's Bridge	0	3	0	8	2	9
Greenisland	1	0	0	0	0	0
Gregstown	0	0	0	3	0	0
Greysteel	0	0	0	1	0	0
Greystone	0	0	0	2	0	0
Groomsport	0	4	0	0	0	0
Harmony Hill	0	0	0	2	0	0
Helen's Bay	0	2	0	0	0	0
Hightown	0	0	0	0	1	0
Hilden	0	2	0	31	0	1
Hillfoot	0	1	0	0	0	0
Hillhall	0	3	0	12	1	0
Hillsborough	0	1	0	8	0	0
Hollywood	0	0	0	2	0	1
Hopefield	0	3	0	16	0	0
Innisfayle	0	2	0	92	0	0

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Irvinestown	0	1	0	0	0	0
Islandmagee	0	4	0	0	0	0
Keady	0	4	0	2	0	0
Kells	0	1	0	0	1	0
Kernan	0	6	0	0	3	0
Kilcooley	0	15	0	31	3	0
Kilkeel	0	2	0	0	0	0
Killinchy	0	0	1	0	0	0
Killyclogher	0	0	0	0	1	0
Killycomain	10	3	0	9	1	0
Killymeal	0	3	0	14	0	0
Kilrea	0	3	0	24	0	0
Kinbane	0	0	0	0	1	0
Knock	0	0	0	0	1	0
Knockmore	0	0	0	1	0	0
Knocknashane	0	2	0	0	0	0
Knocknashinna	0	0	0	20	0	0
Lagan	0	1	0	3	0	0
Lagan Valley	0	5	0	1	1	0
Lagmore	0	3	0	0	0	0
Lambeg	0	4	0	12	2	1
Lecale	0	2	0	0	0	0
Legoniel	0	0	0	0	1	0
Lisnagarvey	0	1	0	0	0	0
Lisnagelvin	0	9	0	1	0	0
Lisnarrick	0	0	0	7	0	0
Lisnaskea	0	5	0	0	0	0
Loughbrickland	0	0	0	0	2	0
Loughgall	0	0	0	0	1	0
Loughry	0	0	0	1	1	0
Loughview	0	5	0	6	2	0
Maghaberry	0	1	0	0	0	0
Maghera	0	1	0	1	1	0
Mahon	0	0	0	2	0	0
Maine	0	1	0	0	1	0
Markethill	0	1	0	1	0	0
Maze	0	0	0	1	0	0
Merok	0	1	0	18	3	0
Moirá	0	0	0	1	0	0
Moneyreagh	0	2	0	2	0	0
Monkstown	0	2	0	1	3	0

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
Mossley	0	1	0	1	1	0
Mountsandel	0	13	0	0	0	0
Mourneview	0	5	0	8	5	0
Movilla	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mullaghmore	0	1	0	4	0	0
Murlough	0	0	0	6	0	0
Musgrave	0	1	0	82	1	0
New Buildings	0	0	0	0	1	0
New Lodge	0	0	0	366	1	6
Newtownbreda	0	0	0	0	1	0
Newtownstewart	0	3	0	0	0	0
Northland	0	3	0	0	0	0
Old Warren	0	1	0	5	0	0
O'Neill	14	2	0	201	1	0
Ormeau	0	0	0	2	2	0
Parklake	0	0	0	4	0	0
Portaferry	0	5	0	1	0	0
Portavogie	0	2	0	0	1	0
Portglenone	0	1	0	0	0	0
Portora	0	5	0	1	0	0
Portrush & Dunluce	4	0	0	13	0	10
Portstewart	0	14	0	21	0	0
Quarry	0	9	0	64	3	4
Quilly	0	2	0	0	0	0
Randalstown	0	5	0	8	1	0
Rathcoole	0	1	0	15	3	1
Ravenhill	0	0	0	1	1	5
Richhill	0	2	0	0	0	0
Roeside	0	1	0	1	0	0
Rosetta	0	3	0	10	1	0
Saintfield	0	2	0	1	0	0
Sandown	0	2	0	50	1	12
Scrabo	0	1	0	2	0	0
Shandon	0	7	0	62	3	13
Shankill	0	24	0	29	11	0
Shantallow	0	0	0	1	0	0
Shantallow East	0	1	0	0	0	0
Shaw's Road	3	2	0	8	1	10
Skeoge	0	0	0	1	0	0
Slievekirk	0	0	0	0	1	0
Springfarm	0	1	0	1	1	0

	Bedsit	Bungalows	Cottages	Flats	Houses	Maisonettes
St. Patrick's	0	0	0	1	0	1
Steeple	0	0	0	4	1	0
Stewartstown	0	1	0	1	0	0
Stiles	0	0	0	3	3	0
Stormont	14	0	0	53	3	0
Strabane West	0	3	0	0	0	0
Strangford	0	1	0	0	0	0
Strule	0	0	0	0	1	0
Sunnylands	0	0	0	2	0	0
Sydenham	0	4	0	2	3	0
Tandragee	0	1	0	1	0	0
The Maidens	0	1	0	1	0	0
The Mall	0	7	0	6	1	0
Tollymore	0	1	0	2	0	0
Town Parks East	0	2	0	0	0	0
Turf Lodge	0	2	0	0	1	0
Twinbrook	0	2	0	5	0	0
University	0	4	0	54	0	0
Upper Malone	0	1	0	27	0	18
Valley	0	0	0	2	2	0
Victoria	0	0	0	4	0	0
Waringstown	0	1	0	0	0	0
Warren	0	1	0	8	0	0
Warrenpoint	0	0	0	3	0	0
Water Works	1	1	0	3	1	0
Waterside	0	0	0	8	0	0
West Winds	0	1	0	22	6	0
Whitehead South	0	6	0	38	0	0
Whitehouse	0	1	0	43	0	0
Windsor	0	0	0	11	1	0
Woodstock	0	0	0	9	0	0
Woodvale	0	11	0	1	1	0
Dwellings Not Attributed To A Ward	1	15	0	183	10	19
Total	99	573	1	3,185	226	241

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 821/16-21; (i) for clarification on the answer provided in relation to resignations during the enquiry as the written answer states seven but the records held by Companies House suggests at least twelve; and (ii) the response states five meetings took place with Disabled Police Officers Association of Northern Ireland between August 2014 and July 2015; to detail dates and times as these would be recorded by the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2220/16-21)

Mr Givan: The answer to part (ii) of AQW 821/16-21 stated: seven Directors or Trustees resigned from the Disabled Police Officers' Association Northern Ireland during the course of the inquiry. This was incorrect due to an administrative error. There were, in fact, eight Directors or Trustees who resigned during the inquiry. AQW 821/16-21 is to be amended to reflect the correct answer.

- (i) Companies House records currently show 15 people as 'resigned' from the Disabled Police Officers' Association Northern Ireland during the inquiry. The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland accepts eight of these only to be resignations of Directors or Trustees while the other seven are not, for the following reasons:
- one was the secretary, not a trustee or director;
 - one had not accepted the post of trustee;
 - one had stood down at the AGM and had not stood for re-election;
 - one was removed by order of the Commission;
 - two were removed by the charity; and
 - one resignation pre-dated the inquiry but was not recorded correctly on Companies House.
- (ii) Charity Commission staff attended five DPOANI board meetings between August 2014 and July 2015 on the following dates:
- 14 November 2014.
 - 7 January 2015.
 - 21 January 2015.
 - 20 April 2015.
 - 20 July 2015.

The Charity Commission does not hold a record of the times of these meetings.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities what cuts to staffing levels at the Magherafelt Jobs and Benefits Office are being implemented as a result of the introduction of universal credit.
(AQW 2240/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are currently no cuts to staffing levels at the Magherafelt Jobs & Benefits office as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit which will not be introduced in Northern Ireland until at least the Autumn of 2017.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities whether he is currently considering the closure of the Cookstown Social Services Office.
(AQW 2241/16-21)

Mr Givan: In preparation for the delivery of Universal Credit in September 2017, my officials are taking forward a programme of work to ensure the local Jobs and Benefits and Social Security offices network is 'fit for purpose' for the changes to benefit delivery and for the introduction of new ways of working.

The determination of the role that individual local offices will play in delivering Universal Credit is an operational matter and each office within the regional network has been assessed to determine whether they are "fit for purpose", what capital work would be required to ensure they are modern to meet the needs of claimants and the scope of the building to support the necessary IT infrastructure to deliver digital based services. The review will also consider the number of claimants who are using the individual offices and whether there are options available by which those claimants could access the necessary services.

My Department plans to issue a numbers of proposals for consultation in the forthcoming weeks which will allow all interested parties to contribute to the final decisions which it is planned will be taken in the autumn 2016.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities what advice has been given to surplus staff in Mid Ulster about applying for jobs in Belfast and Foyle following the implementation of cuts in local staffing levels as a result of the introduction of universal credit.
(AQW 2242/16-21)

Mr Givan: There are currently no cuts to staffing levels in mid Ulster as a result of the introduction of Universal Credit which will not be introduced in Northern Ireland until at least the Autumn of 2017.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) how the outcome of the European Union referendum will impact European funding and activities in the voluntary and community sector; and (ii) how any shortfall will be replaced.
(AQW 2251/16-21)

Mr Givan: It is too early to make a meaningful assessment of the impact of the outcome of the European Union referendum on the voluntary and community sector or how any potential shortfall will be replaced. No decision has been made by HM Government on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union. Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Communities to detail the funding awarded by his Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2259/16-21)

Mr Givan:

Ardoyne	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	Total £'000
Capital Projects	20	-	15	35
Resource Projects	140	219	140	499

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) what funding streams are currently available; and (ii) what plans he has to extend funding, for organizations such as Chomhaltas Ceolteoiri Eireann.

(AQW 2282/16-21)

Mr Givan: Funding for the arts is dispersed, in the main, through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). ACNI has advised that its Small Grants Programme will reopen soon. The programme provides awards of up to £10,000 and its aim is to assist organisations to deliver arts projects which contribute to the growth of arts in the community for new and existing audiences and which reflect the diversity of Northern Ireland's society and culture.

ACNI's annual funding programme is expected to open in and around October or early November 2016. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann has been awarded £34,000 per year from the annual funding programme in each of the last four years.

Ms Gildernew asked the Minister for Communities to detail how often he reviews the specification of Supported Housing Units to ensure supported housing meets required standards and the expectations of modern living.

(AQW 2286/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has recently completed a Review of the Supporting People Programme, which highlighted the quality of Supported Housing services but recognised the need to develop a more flexible model of Supported Housing in the future, to meet changing need. Implementation of the Review's recommendations is underway and a review of the design specification for Supported Housing in the social housing sector is planned.

In addition to the Supporting People Review, significant progress has been during the last mandate to help improve housing choices for people with complex needs and disabilities, including:

- The Interdepartmental Review of Housing Adaptations;
- The launch of the Adaptation Design Communications Toolkit;
- The development of an interim Accessible Housing Register; and
- The completion of a review of Wheelchair Design Standards

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how he intends to proceed with the introduction of a Town Centre Regeneration Challenge Fund.

(AQW 2310/16-21)

Mr Givan: I will examine the scope for the introduction of a Town Centre Challenge Fund in line with the process set out for the development of the Programme for Government and the Executive's budget over the course of this mandate.

This provides a mechanism for ensuring that limited funds are best directed to where they can contribute most. The development of any new regeneration programmes will be as part of the outworking of this process.

Department of Education

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Education to detail the funding awarded by his Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2144/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The table below shows the Department's capital and resource expenditure in the Ardoyne ward in each of the last three financial years:-

Capital Expenditure in Ardoyne Area	2013-14 £	2014-15 £	2015-16 £
Holy Cross Nursery School (NS)	0	0	0
Holy Cross Boys Primary School (PS)	33,120	101,507	81,705

Capital Expenditure in Ardoyne Area	2013-14 £	2014-15 £	2015-16 £
Holy Cross Pre-School (Playgroup)	0	31,659	0
Total	33,120	133,166	81,705
Resource Expenditure in Ardoyne Area			
Holy Cross NS1	295,750	205,134	252,028
Holy Cross Boys PS1	1,827,878	1,681,960	1,744,509
Ardoyne Youth Club	64,884	93,927	128,556
Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	5,700	4,650	2,536
John Paul II Youth Club	84,386	110,436	91,416
Holy Cross Pre-School (Playgroup)	40,704	31,107	43,730
Total	2,319,302	2,127,214	2,262,775

- 1 Please note Schools' figures include all delegated expenditure and schools meals related expenditure.
- 2 Additional funding is provided to the Ardoyne Area for Sure Start however this funding is not allocated at ward level and therefore cannot be broken down on this basis

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education (i) how many nurture units are in schools in the top 10 per cent of most deprived wards; (ii) how many nurture units are in each constituency; and (iii) how many schools are planning to provide nurture units.

(AQW 2172/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Of the existing schools with DE funded nurture units there are 16 that fall within the top 10 percent of the most deprived wards.
- (ii) The table below shows the breakdown of the 30 DE funded nurture by constituency.

Belfast East	1
Belfast North	4
Belfast South	2
Belfast West	9
East Londonderry	2
Foyle	5
Newry and Armagh	1
North Antrim	1
North Down	1
South Antrim	1
South Down	1
Strangford	1
Upper Bann	1

- (iii) Schools may choose to establish nurture units funded from their delegated budgets. The Department does not hold details of schools planning to establish any such units.

Department for the Economy

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the level of investment in Newry and Armagh for (i) broadband provision; and (ii) mobile phone coverage in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1898/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy):**(i) Broadband Provision**

My Department has invested some £35m in broadband projects over the last 5 years across Northern Ireland. It is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on a constituency basis, due to the nature of the projects. The following table sets out expenditure by year and by project:

Project Title	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/2016	Total
Remote Broadband Services (Satellite)	£123,436.00	£1.10	£0.00			£123,437.10
Next Generation Broadband Project	£3,095,266.00	£3,571,364.89	£0.00			£6,666,630.89
NI Broadband Fund	£250,102.79	£5,892.56	£7,540.00	£106,173.63	£35,541.77	£405,250.75
Logon-ni (Broadband Stimulation)	£660,000.00	£659,528.26	£474,680.28			£1,794,208.54
NI Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP)			£4,500,000.00	£6,000,000.00*	£7,248,000.00	£17,748,000.00
Superfast Rollout Project (SRP)				£5,000,000.00	£2,367,000.00	£7,367,000.00
Annual Total	£4,746,552.89	£4,391,223.83	£4,982,220.28	£11,106,173.63	£9,650,541.77	£34,876,712.40

* Includes £5m provided by DARD.

(ii) Mobile Phone Coverage

My Department has not made any investments in the mobile market in Northern Ireland during this period. The mobile phone market is highly competitive and fast moving and the operators are currently investing in their networks and developing new products and services that can offer better coverage and more adaptable packages. My Department keeps a watching brief on these investments, to determine if further public intervention will be required once they are completed.

The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) which was developed, resourced and managed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), deployed 9 new sites across Northern Ireland, 3 of which are located in County Armagh. My Department did not have any direct involvement in this UK wide project which completed in March 2016.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for the Economy what action his Department is taking to encourage more people to take up apprenticeships.

(AQW 1945/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme currently offers apprentices, in paid employment from day one, the opportunity to follow a national training framework which leads to the attainment of industry approved competence and knowledge based qualifications at Level 2 or 3 in conjunction with Essential Skills qualifications (where appropriate). The programme offers training across approximately 140 occupational areas.

In the case of apprentices aged 16-24 years, my Department funds 100% of the cost of off-the-job training. Funding is paid at 50% in respect of those aged 25 years and over and focused on specific frameworks in priority economic sectors.

My Department is in the process of implementing major reforms of Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training landscape through a new system of apprenticeships and youth training. Underpinned by quality, breadth, progression and portability, these reforms will ensure the future apprenticeship and youth training system will support the growth and rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy.

Through the further development of higher level apprenticeships, we are now providing a direct route into a range of occupations and sectors previously only accessible through traditional higher education pathways. This approach is designed to encourage participants and employers to engage with a seamless progression of training provision from skills level 2 through to level 8, particularly in non traditional sectors of the economy such as Information Communication Technology (ICT), Professional Services and Accountancy.

A range of support services, currently under development, is designed to encourage increased uptake of apprenticeships by demonstrating the benefits of apprenticeships to employers and will provide support to the apprentice, employer and training

provider. The associated on-line portal will allow employers to advertise all apprenticeship opportunities and will encourage potential apprentices to consider a wide range of employment options across a range of sectors, relevant to the economy.

My Department's Careers Service will work in tandem with the introduction of the online service to provide impartial advice and guidance for young people considering the youth training and apprenticeship pathway.

Department of Finance

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 36/16-21, for a breakdown of the agricultural funds total. (AQW 1507/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has advised that the breakdown of Agricultural Funds receipts is shown in the following table:

Agricultural Funding	Receipts
Basic Payment Scheme/ Single Farm Payment	£ 163,238,000
Greening	£70,766,000
Young Farmers	£ 4,823,000
Rural Development Programme	£ 23,614,000
Total Resource Funds	£262,441,000
European Fisheries Fund	£ 2,643,000
Interreg Funding	£5,000
Rural Development Programme	£1,275,000
Pillar One (Common Agricultural Policy)	£201,000
Total Capital Funds	£4,124,000
Total Agricultural Funds Receipts in 2015/16	£ 266,565,000

These figures have been obtained from the Department's draft resource accounts for the 2015-16 financial year. This figure will be subject to change as the 2015-16 accounts are subject to ongoing audit. The accounts are due to be certified and laid in the Assembly at the beginning of July.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance whether he will bring local authorities under the Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy. (AQW 1576/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Northern Ireland Public Procurement Policy (NIPPP) applies to Northern Ireland Departments, their Agencies, non-Departmental Public Bodies and Public Corporations.

Local authorities are bodies corporate as defined by the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972. As such they are independent of the Executive and departments, and are directly responsible and accountable for decisions regarding their own financial affairs. It is not within my remit to mandate NIPPP for local authorities' own expenditure.

However public bodies (including local authorities) which receive grants for specific purposes from central government are expected to apply NIPPP to the grants' expenditure by virtue of the conditions of grant. In addition, CPD promotes NIPPP as best practice within the wider public sector, and has been engaging with Councils on closer collaboration including use of the eTenders NI portal.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) all groups including volunteer, community, sporting or otherwise that received funding from his Department; and (ii) the amount allocated, in each of the last three years. (AQW 1784/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has provided funding to the following groups in the last three years:

Organisation Name	£000s		
	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Charity for Civil Servants	42	42	42
NI Civil Service Sports Association	93	93	100

Organisation Name	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
The Somme Association	47	47	47

My Department also provided funding to the following projects under Priority 2.1c of the Public Sector Collaboration theme of the INTERREG IVA

Programme. Please note the funding represents total allocations to the project including ERDF, NI match funding, Irish Government funding and Scottish contributions where appropriate.

£000s

Organisation name	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
RNIB Northern Ireland	605	8	-
The Cedar Foundation	108	-	-
Centre for Cross Border Studies	379	390	18
Action Mental Health	77	90	90

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Finance (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future in East Derry that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for his assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or his Department.

(AQW 1818/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: DFP was the accountable Department for a number of themes under the 2007-13 PEACE III and INTERREG IV Programmes. All projects under these themes are now complete.

The 2014-20 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes have opened for calls but no funds have yet been committed to projects.

The implications of the UK Referendum vote to leave the EU and the risks to programme funding are unclear at this point. I can confirm however that the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government have affirmed their commitment to the successful implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes.

I will fully explore the issue of securing the ERDF funding for PEACE and INTERREG with my counterpart in DPER and with the European Commission. Until a decision to leave is agreed with the EU, and the terms clarified I expect all EU Structural Funds programmes to continue as normal.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future, that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for his assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or his Department.

(AQW 1823/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: DFP was the Accountable Department for a number of themes under the 2007-13 PEACE III and INTERREG IV Programmes. All projects under these themes are now complete.

The 2014-20 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes have opened for calls but no funds have yet been committed to projects.

The implications of the Referendum for programme funding are unclear at this point. I can confirm however that the Executive and Irish Government have affirmed their commitment to the successful implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes.

In addition, I will fully explore the issue of securing the ERDF funding for PEACE and INTERREG with my counterpart in DPER and with the European Commission.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Finance (i) to detail the projects (a) in progress; and (b) scheduled for the future in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by his Department, that have received EU funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) for her assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Executive Office or his Department.

(AQW 1829/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: DFP was the Accountable Department for a number of themes under the 2007-13 PEACE III and INTERREG IV Programmes. All projects under these themes are now complete.

The 2014-20 PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes have opened for calls but no funds have yet been committed to projects.

The implications of the UK Referendum vote to leave the EU and the risks to programme funding are unclear at this point. I can confirm however that the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government have affirmed their commitment to the successful implementation of the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes.

I will fully explore the issue of securing the ERDF funding for PEACE and INTERREG with my counterpart in DPER and with the European Commission. Until a decision to leave is agreed with the EU, and the terms clarified I expect all EU Structural Funds programmes to continue as normal.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance to detail the value of exports to each member state of the EU in each calendar year from 2011 to 2015.

(AQW 1832/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The value of goods exports for the period requested is available from the HMRC Regional Trade Statistics (RTS) and is presented in Table 1. The RTS are published quarterly and show trade in goods at summary product and country level, split by UK regions and devolved administrations.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency has developed a business survey based estimate which also includes the value of services sold outside Northern Ireland. Services export data is available for 2011-2014 only and is not available at the individual country level. Table 2 provides an estimate of the total value of goods and services exports to the EU using the two sources.

Table 1. Value of the export of goods from Northern Ireland to each EU member state: £million (2011 - 2015)

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Austria	9	17	19	16	15
Belgium	90	100	103	95	90
Bulgaria	5	4	4	4	8
Croatia	..	..	1	1	2
Cyprus	8	5	5	4	3
Czech Republic	26	21	30	33	34
Denmark	45	37	40	53	42
Estonia	2	2	2	2	3
Finland	30	24	27	28	28
France	314	272	312	301	305
Germany	240	226	258	319	339
Greece	12	9	9	10	8
Hungary	11	13	13	14	15
Irish Republic	2,241	2,071	2,264	2,296	2,118
Italy	71	59	58	63	59
Latvia	3	6	6	6	6
Lithuania	9	10	12	11	9
Luxembourg	0	1	1	0	1
Malta	4	4	5	4	4
Netherlands	138	138	141	135	126
Poland	59	46	42	41	68
Portugal	48	44	31	35	26
Romania	8	9	16	15	22
Slovakia	3	2	3	3	4
Slovenia	3	2	2	1	2
Spain	107	80	88	104	93
Sweden	47	35	38	33	51
Total	3,533	3,236	3,528	3,630	3,481

Source: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC

Table 2. Value of the export of goods and services from Northern Ireland to the EU: £million (2011 - 2015)

	HMRC export of goods	NISRA Survey based estimate of export of services	Total EU exports
2011	3,533	812	4,345
2012	3,236	921	4,157
2013	3,528	1,003	4,531
2014	3,630	999	4,628
2015	3,481	N/A	N/A

Sources: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC;

Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics, NISRA

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to outline what work will be commissioned in preparation for any extra powers which will come to his Department in consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

(AQW 1841/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: It is too early to be definitive about what additional powers are likely to be secured. No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive and my Department will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that new opportunities are developed as part of any new arrangements.

At the request of the Executive Office, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. The Executive Office also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and deputy First Minister.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal for this region.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance to detail the value of exports to each country outside the EU in each year from 2011 to 2015.

(AQW 1844/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The value of goods exports for the period requested is available from the HMRC Regional Trade Statistics (RTS) and is presented in Table 1. The RTS are published quarterly and show trade in goods at summary product and country level, split by UK regions and devolved administrations.

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency has developed a business survey based estimate which also includes the value of services sold outside Northern Ireland. Services export data is available for 2011-2014 only and is not available at the individual country level. Table 2 provides an estimate of the total value of goods and services exports to countries outside the EU using the two sources.

Table 1. Value of the export of goods from Northern Ireland to each country outside the EU: £million (2011 - 2015)

Continent	Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Asia and Oceania	Australia	116	146	122	82	86
	China	63	80	89	94	91
	Hong Kong	45	42	49	47	37
	India	22	27	23	15	16
	Indonesia	7	4	13	4	3
	Japan	33	28	20	30	30
	New Zealand	8	11	18	21	16
	Other Asia and Oceania	137	128	124	110	107
	Pakistan	16	21	14	12	9
	Philippines	9	6	4	7	14

Continent	Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Singapore	54	47	54	38	37
	South Korea	18	12	26	24	71
	Taiwan	5	11	7	43	7
	Thailand	127	105	108	92	95
Total		660	668	670	618	619
Eastern Europe	Croatia	2	2	1	..	..
	Other Eastern Europe	12	11	16	14	16
	Russia	33	63	72	44	31
	Ukraine	12	18	18	13	22
Total		60	95	106	71	69
Latin America and Caribbean	Argentina	8	6	10	6	6
	Barbados	0	0	0	1	1
	Brazil	17	29	30	20	18
	Chile	22	21	24	12	12
	Colombia	12	17	23	6	9
	Costa Rica	2	2	2	3	2
	Dominican Rep	1	2	2	1	2
	Ecuador	2	4	2	3	1
	Guyana	1	1	1	1	0
	Jamaica	1	1	0	3	4
	Other Latin America and the Caribbean	11	13	12	10	12
	Panama	4	2	1	1	1
	Trinidad:Tobago	1	1	1	2	2
	Uruguay	1	1	1	1	1
	Venezuela	2	9	3	1	0
Total		86	109	112	71	73
Middle East and N Africa	Algeria	17	7	4	4	5
	Bahrain	6	7	3	2	2
	Egypt	11	11	6	13	18
	Iran	2	1	0	0	1
	Israel	28	25	15	13	17
	Jordan	6	6	7	5	6
	Kuwait	11	38	17	11	9
	Lebanon	13	15	12	9	12
	Libya	1	3	5	3	0
	Morocco	4	6	5	9	16
	Oman	10	21	21	10	14
	Other Middle East and North Africa	16	25	29	21	18
	Qatar	8	17	18	11	21
	Saudi Arabia	80	112	82	78	79
	South Sudan	..	..	0	0	0

Continent	Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	Syria	2	1	1	0	0
	Tunisia	3	4	7	5	2
	Uae	101	84	60	50	64
Total		320	381	291	245	285
North America	Canada	524	345	384	332	368
	Mexico	29	35	33	34	35
	Other North America	0	..	0	0	0
	United States	461	500	576	646	1,116
Total		1,014	881	993	1,012	1,519
Sub-Saharan Africa	Angola	13	21	26	17	11
	Botswana	0	0	0	0	1
	Cameroon	1	2	2	3	3
	Ethiopia	2	3	4	3	4
	Ghana	10	10	9	6	10
	Ivory Coast	17	24	18	17	17
	Kenya	12	21	19	17	14
	Mauritius	2	2	1	2	1
	Namibia	1	0	1	1	1
	Nigeria	41	51	43	50	23
	Other Sub-Saharan Africa	55	47	59	51	54
	South Africa	45	45	37	43	33
	Tanzania	4	2	3	2	1
	Zimbabwe	1	1	0	0	1
Total		203	230	223	210	172
Western Europe exc EC	Iceland	2	2	4	3	5
	Norway	19	23	25	26	21
	Other Western Europe	3	1	1	1	2
	Switzerland	34	40	37	50	63
	Turkey	39	35	46	41	38
Total		97	101	112	120	128
Stores and Provisions	Stores & Provis.	..	..	..	..	0
Non EU Total		2,440	2,464	2,507	2,348	2,865

Source: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC

Table 2. Value of the export of goods and services from Northern Ireland to countries outside the EU: £million (2011 - 2015)

	HMRC export of goods	NISRA survey based estimate of export of services	Total non-EU exports
2011	2,440	316	2,756
2012	2,464	437	2,901
2013	2,507	533	3,040

	HMRC export of goods	NISRA survey based estimate of export of services	Total non-EU exports
2014	2,348	497	2,845
2015	2,865	N/A	N/A

Sources: Regional Trade Statistics, HMRC;

Broad Economy Sales and Exports Statistics, NISRA

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance whether he plans to introduce a cap on public sector exit payments similar to the £95,000 cap introduced in Great Britain.

(AQW 1905/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Although HM Treasury has made provision in the Enterprise Act 2016 to cap public sector exit payments in Britain, regulations have not yet come into force. HM Treasury anticipate that the regulations are not likely to come into force until after 1 October 2016.

On 7 December 2015, the Assembly considered and declined to agree a Legislative Consent Motion to extend the provisions in the Enterprise Act 2016 to cap exit payments to the public sector here. I have no immediate plans to introduce a cap but will consider this issue in the future, in light of other anticipated public sector exit payment related policy developments.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Finance (a) how many Civil Service staff have availed of the Voluntary Exit Scheme; and (b) how many have been re-employed to undertake work for the Civil Service in a temporary capacity or from a recruitment agency.

(AQW 2244/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As at the final exit tranche on 31st May, 2,996 staff have left the NICS under the Voluntary Exit Scheme ('the Scheme').

In relation to the second part of your question, I can confirm that my Department has not run any temporary recruitment exercises since the Scheme was launched. Information relating to former NICS staff being employed through an Employment Agency is not held by my Department. There is nothing in the rules of the NICS Compensation Scheme to prevent a beneficiary of the Scheme taking up employment subsequently, to undertake work for the Civil Service through an Employment Agency.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the work of the Northern Ireland Investment Fund.

(AQW 2320/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The development of the Investment Fund is continuing.

The next stage is to finalise the fund manager procurement strategy and obtain a classification decision from the Office for National Statistics. Department of Finance officials are engaging with the European Investment Bank, Central Procurement Directorate and Office for National Statistics respectively on these issues.

The aim is to have the Fund established before 31 March 2017.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) the number of whole time equivalent (WTE) employees in the Northern Ireland Civil Service in each of the last five years, including as of 1 June 2016; and (ii) the total salary bill for each year.

(AQW 2321/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The table below sets out the number of full time equivalent (FTE) employees in the Northern Ireland Civil Service as at 1 April in the years 2012 to 2016.

Number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) NICS Staff (April 2012 to April 2016)

Year	Total Number of FTE Staff
2012	26,187
2013	26,276
2014	26,408
2015	25,151
2016	22,365

Notes: Data sourced from HRConnect and other DOJ databases as at 1st April each year.

Excludes staff who are on career break or secondment to other organisations.

Includes permanent and temporary staff in the 12 ministerial departments, the Public Prosecution Service, the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland, the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland, staff of The Assembly Ombudsman for Northern Ireland/ The Northern Ireland Commissioner for Complaints and the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Team.

AOCC staff largely moved to NIPSO on the 1st April 2016 and so are excluded from the 2016 figure.

FTE figures are calculated by expressing each part-time employee's hours as a proportion of a full time employee's hours. Thus, for example, someone working 18.5 hours per week counts as 0.5 staff, since a full-time employee is considered to work 37 hours per week.

Employee figures for the first quarter of 2016/17, setting out the position at 1 July 2016, have not yet been collated and validated. When available, these can be found at the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency website:

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Employment_in_the_NICS.html

The NICS pay-bill cost for the financial years 2011/12 to 2015/16 is as follows:

Year	Total Paybill Cost
2011/12	£921,230,520
2012/13	£927,973,359
2013/14	£951,891,439
2014/15	£943,281,365
2015/16	£901,940,646

Footnote: Figures include a small number of non civil servants appearing on departmental payrolls e.g. Industrial Tribunal Members, Planning and Water Appeals Committee Members.

Department of Health

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health to detail the total amount spent by each Health and Social Care Trust on diabetes education in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1314/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): The questions have been taken to refer to structured diabetes education programmes for adults and children living with diabetes. The table below shows the total spend by each Health and Social Care Trust on structured diabetes education programmes and the per capita spend based on total Trust population. Figures have been provided by Trusts and have not been validated by the Department.

Spend on Structured Diabetes Education Programmes

HSC Trust		2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Belfast HSC Trust	Total Spend	22,967	22,967	301,431*
	Per capita	0.06	0.06	0.89
Northern HSC Trust	Total Spend	57,772	57,772	99,022**
	Per capita	0.12	0.12	0.21
Southern HSC Trust	Total Spend	65,104	57,596	47,023
	Per capita	0.18	0.16	0.13
South Eastern HSC Trust	Total Spend	57,549	57,549	59,505
	Per capita	0.16	0.16	0.17
Western HSC Trust	Total Spend	25,910	56,931	58,081
	Per capita	0.09	0.19	0.20

* includes increase in staffing costs following establishment of diabetes education team to deliver Type 2 diabetes education programmes.

** new structured education programme for Type 2 diabetes commenced Nov 2015.

In addition to structured diabetes education programmes, adults and children living with diabetes (and their carers) may also receive advice, information and support to self manage their condition through other interventions, such as diabetes review appointments.

Mr Lyons asked the Minister of Health to detail the per capita spend on diabetes education in each Health and Social Care Trust area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1315/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The questions have been taken to refer to structured diabetes education programmes for adults and children living with diabetes. The table below shows the total spend by each Health and Social Care Trust on structured diabetes education programmes and the per capita spend based on total Trust population. Figures have been provided by Trusts and have not been validated by the Department.

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Western HSC Trust	Total Spend	25,910	56,931	58,081
	Per capita	0.09	0.19	0.20

* includes increase in staffing costs following establishment of diabetes education team to deliver Type 2 diabetes education programmes.

** new structured education programme for Type 2 diabetes commenced Nov 2015.

In addition to structured diabetes education programmes, adults and children living with diabetes (and their carers) may also receive advice, information and support to self manage their condition through other interventions, such as diabetes review appointments.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health how many children and young people have (i) suffered harm; and (ii) died as result of neglect or abuse whilst known to social services in the last two years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 1604/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) is notified of and, where the notification meets specific statutory criteria, will carry out a Case Management Review (CMR) when a child has died or has been significantly harmed and abuse of the child is known or suspected. CMR is a statutory function of the SBNI under section 3(4) of the Safeguarding Board Act (NI) 2011.

There were five cases notified to the SBNI between June 2014 and July 2016, involving children who had died or suffered significant harm due to known or suspected abuse and/or neglect. All children were known to Health and Social Care Services; four of the five were known to Family and Child Care services within Health and Social Care Trusts.

Furthermore:

- (i) The HSC Trusts maintain information on the number of children on the Child Protection Register where abuse has been confirmed, however, to assess if the child was known to Social Services at the time when the abuse took place would require a manual trawl of hundreds of records.
- (ii) In line with HSCB procedure (October 2013) the criteria for reporting Serious Adverse Incidents (SAIs) includes: "any death of a child in receipt of HSC services (up to eighteenth birthday). This includes hospital and community services, a Looked After Child or a child whose name is on the Child Protection Register". If a child's death is a result of abuse or neglect, this will be a finding for the Coroner and may also be investigated by the police as a criminal matter. Consequently any review of individual SAI Review Reports may not provide a conclusion that a child's death was as a result of abuse or neglect. From 1 October 2013 to 31 May 2016, 375 HSC child deaths were reported as SAIs. The information for (ii) would require a manual trawl through the 375 files with possible inconclusive results. This information can therefore not be provided.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health how much it costs the Health Service annually to treat chronic pain.
(AQW 1729/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Investment in the treatment of chronic pain is split across community, primary and secondary care settings, and in partnership with voluntary agencies. An overall budget amount cannot therefore be provided.

There are a range of alternatives for treating pain currently under development. However, implementation is dependent upon available resources against other competing pressures for new investment in service developments. These include:

- Implementation of a Stepped Care Model;
- Access to a full range of local support groups and self-management courses;
- Awareness of Lifestyle alternatives and complementary therapies
- Online self-help tools;
- Early assessment in primary care, with locally based nurse and allied health professional clinics;
- Reduction in prescribing of pain drugs and opioids;
- Expansion of specialist multi-disciplinary Pain Management Programmes;
- Consultant-led services for complex interventions for the small number of people who require hospital based care.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health what alternatives are being considered in the treatment of chronic pain.
(AQW 1730/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Investment in the treatment of chronic pain is split across community, primary and secondary care settings, and in partnership with voluntary agencies. An overall budget amount cannot therefore be provided.

There are a range of alternatives for treating pain currently under development. However, implementation is dependent upon available resources against other competing pressures for new investment in service developments. These include:

- Implementation of a Stepped Care Model;
- Access to a full range of local support groups and self-management courses;
- Awareness of Lifestyle alternatives and complementary therapies
- Online self-help tools;
- Early assessment in primary care, with locally based nurse and allied health professional clinics;
- Reduction in prescribing of pain drugs and opioids;
- Expansion of specialist multi-disciplinary Pain Management Programmes;
- Consultant-led services for complex interventions for the small number of people who require hospital based care.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health whether the decision to leave the European Union will have an effect on the proposed all-island Children's Heart Surgery Centre in Dublin.
(AQW 1750/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I aim to continue with beneficial all-island approaches to health and social care and address the uncertainties and challenges that now exist as a result of the recent EU referendum as and when they emerge. I therefore intend to deliver on my recent Joint Policy Statement with Minister Simon Harris TD which set out our shared commitment to developing the Congenital Heart Disease Network and other all-island health networks in order to maximise the benefits that collaboration on health and social care services will bring to patients across the island.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has any plans to revisit the 2015-16 pay award to Health Workers and change the status to consolidated.
(AQW 1798/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: At present my Department has no plans to revisit the 2015/16 HSC Pay Award.

I have recently announced the 2016/17 HSC Pay Award which will see all eligible staff receiving a 1% consolidated award with effect from 1 April 2016.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health whether she will consider the feasibility of developing a cancer strategy.
(AQW 1865/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Meeting the challenge to our community posed by cancer is, and will continue to be of great importance. We have made great strides in tackling cancer and have seen significant progress in the decade since the opening of the Cancer Centre at Belfast City Hospital. I can assure you that I will give due consideration to the need for a comprehensive cancer strategy.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount spent by the Western Health and Social Care Trust in providing (i) agency staff; and (ii) locum staff at the South West Acute Hospital.
(AQW 1883/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The amount spent on Agency and Locum staff by the Western Health and Social Care Trust is detailed below;

South West Acute Hospital	2015/16 £(m)
Agency Staff	£4.3m
Locum Staff*	£0.09m

Source: Western Health and Social Care Trust

* Locum costs refer to staff who are on a Trust contract or internal locum rates

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the principle of compensation for patients that have suffered ill health through using medicines which, unknown to them, have health and safety risks.

(AQW 1911/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In the event of a medicine proven to be unsafe, I support the principle of drug manufacturers providing compensation for patients that have suffered ill health through the use of medicines which, unknown to them, carried unacceptable safety risks. However, compensation for such patients is properly a matter for the legal system to address.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health whether any local patients have received compensation for taking Vioxx.

(AQW 1913/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am not aware of any local patients having received compensation from the manufacturer for taking Vioxx.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to provide details on the Clinical Advisory Group on Organ Donation including (i) its membership; (ii) meetings held; (iii) reports issued; and (iv) future plans for the group.

(AQW 1931/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Clinical Advisory Group (CAG) is chaired by Dr Paul Glover, regional clinical lead for transplantation. Its initial membership includes Dr Tim Brown, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Monica Hackett, NHS Blood and Transplant and Jackie Johnston, Department of Health. The initial meetings have involved the chair and CAG Manager in the development of several workstreams, reflecting its terms of reference which were placed in the Assembly in March 2016. The workstreams will be presented to a full meeting of the CAG later in this summer with a detailed work to follow over the autumn and winter, with a view to completing its work by March 2017.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health for her assessment on the current usage of agency workers in the Health Service.

(AQW 1947/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am committed to ensuring a first-class health service, in which services are delivered primarily in-house.

Whilst I recognise that use of agency staff can contribute importantly to maintaining service provision to patients and clients in specific, short-term, circumstances, it is an important on-going policy aim for the health service, to manage and control such expenditure.

HSC Trusts have been asked to examine reliance upon agency staff and my Department will continue to monitor expenditure closely.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health what action her Department will take to improve early diagnosis in suspected cancer cases.

(AQW 1948/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Early detection of cancer greatly increases the chances for successful treatment. The Public Health Agency has a current publicity campaign to improve public knowledge of the early signs of cancer and to encourage those with specific symptoms to seek medical advice as soon as possible. Population screening programmes are another important approach to early detection of cancer. Breast, bowel and cervical cancer screening programmes are available to people in the north. In addition those patients suspected of having a diagnosis of cancer are categorised as red flag referrals and are prioritised for an appointment as soon as possible.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the adequacy of transport arrangements for patients transferred away from the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 1975/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Health and Social Care Trust will arrange the transfer of patients taking into account the clinical condition of the individual patient and the urgency of the transfer. This may be by ambulance or, if it is assessed as appropriate, a patient may on occasion be transferred by their family or by contract taxi.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health to detail the amount spent in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area on private taxis.

(AQW 1976/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: This information is not held at a constituency level, therefore it is not possible to provide an answer.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health how many children have had to travel outside of Northern Ireland for medical treatment in the last 12 months, including a breakdown of where the treatment has taken place.

(AQW 2014/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) have advised that information in relation to Extra Contractual Referrals (ECRs) is collected on the basis of approvals rather than the actual treatment carried out.

The HSCB are not able to confirm that the reported number of children travelled within the financial year as travel may not occur in the year in which approval is given. In addition, travel may not take place at all, or may result in multiple treatments over a period of years.

The following table provides information on the number of cases where prior approval has been granted during the 2015/16 financial year, for children who were aged under 18 at 1st April 2016.

	Number of referrals, by location of provider			
	England	ROI	Scotland/ Wales	Europe
Prior approval process	222	17	8	*
Service Level Agreement	-	59	-	-
Total	222	76	8	*

Source: HSCB

* Cells with values less than 5 have been masked to protect patient confidentiality.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Health how much funding her Department has provided to organisations that train and provide guide dogs, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2033/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has not provided any funding in the last three years to organisations that train and provide guide dogs.

My Department provides funding to the RNIB here in the north of Ireland who will receive £59,020 in 2016/17 to help support those with sight loss in our community.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health to detail which allied health professions use the regional list system to fill vacancies.

(AQW 2077/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The following allied health professions currently use the regional list system to fill vacancies.

- Physiotherapy
- Occupational Therapy
- Radiography
- Podiatry
- Dietetics
- Speech & Language Therapy

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) what changes will be made to the promotion of organ donation following the passage of the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill; and (ii) what funds will be allocated to future promotion initiatives.

(AQW 2096/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 1931/16-21. Changes to the promotion of organ donation will be informed by the work of the Clinical Advisory Group, which is progressing several workstreams between now and March 2017 to fulfil the Department's obligations under the Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2016. In the meantime my Department has made £250k available to progress this work in 2016/17.

Mr Kelly asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to ensure that groups working in the most deprived areas are supported in providing (i) suicide prevention training and support and (ii) good mental health resilience work.

(AQW 2134/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Protect Life Strategy focuses on reducing the difference in the suicide rate between the most deprived and least deprived areas. In line with this training is provided for "community gatekeepers" in deprived areas on suicide prevention and mental health promotion. Crisis intervention is provided through the Lifeline service which also provides access to counselling. Self harm intervention services are in place and a wide range of community groups are supported to provide suicide prevention services.

The Public Health Agency small grants funding programme supports the promotion of mental and emotional wellbeing, and suicide prevention, with a particular focus on the 20% most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

I recently met with community and voluntary sector representatives to explore how their efforts to prevent suicide in Belfast, particularly in the most deprived areas, could be further supported and I look forward to the outcome of the "Future Search" exercise which is to review the suicide response in the city.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of patients from East Londonderry who have received cancer treatment; broken down for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2152/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of patients treated for cancer is not available. However, information is available on the number of people diagnosed with Cancer.

Number of new cases of cancer diagnosed in patients in the East Derry parliamentary constituency each year from 2010-2014.

Year	All cancers
2010	619
2011	621
2012	746
2013	694
2014	684

Source: Cancer Registry

Please note that not all patients diagnosed with cancer were subsequently treated for their disease

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of staff working within the South West Acute Hospital; broken down by (i) clinical discipline; and (ii) whether they are permanent or temporary, since the hospital opened.

(AQW 2165/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: South West Acute Hospital staff as at 31st March 2016

Occupational Family	Permanent		Temporary	
	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent	Headcount	Whole-time Equivalent
Admin & Clerical	180	152.08	18	14.29
Support Services / Estates	229	179.64	8	7.19
Medical & Dental	60	57.94	40**	38
Nursing & Midwifery	669	594.37	22	20.52
Professional & Technical	192	164.69	24	21.4
Social Services	40	37.94	3	2.21
Total	1370	1186.66	115	103.61

Source: Western Health & Social Care Trust

**please note 85% of the temporary medical & dental staff number relates to doctors in training as they are on fixed term rotational contracts throughout their training.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health to outline how she intends to reduce spend on agency, banking and locum staff within the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2166/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A range of measures are in place to reduce reliance on agency, bank and locum staff in the Western Health and Social Care Trust. These include:

- appointing 20 doctors from European and international sources to "hard to fill" vacancies;
- broadening the audience for medical & clinical vacancies to include international applicants; and
- participating in regional HSC recruitment initiatives for Band 5 Nursing posts organised by Business Services Organisation.
- A further campaign to the Philippines is planned for August 2016.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health to detail the average access times for appointments and treatments within the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2209/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information relating to waiting times for a first consultant led outpatient appointment is collected in aggregated timebands. At 31st March 2016, the most recent date for which official statistics are available, the median waiting timeband for a first consultant led outpatient appointment in the Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust was >12-15 weeks.

Inpatient waiting time information is collected at patient level. The average waiting time, in weeks, for inpatient treatment at this date in the Western (HSC) Trust was 21.5 weeks.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of how European Union membership benefits (a) her Department; and (b) public health and wellbeing.

(AQW 2246/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (a) In terms of resources, there are a range of European funding opportunities, structural funds and competitive programmes, of which my Department and the wider HSC has benefited. These are used to support both service delivery and Research and Development.

My Department received €30m from the European Regional Development Fund as part of the Interreg IVA cross-border programme 'Putting Patients, Clients and Families First'. The programme ran from 2009 until the second quarter of 2015 and supported a range of cross-border health-based projects, as well as projects aimed at tackling social exclusion and fostering positive mental health, for people in the border area. All projects funded under Interreg IVA have been completed.

The Interreg VA funding programme runs from 2014 to 2020 and has allocated €53m to support health and social care projects across the north of Ireland, the border area of the south and western Scotland. The north would expect to receive €31.8m from the programme in the period to 2020 and applications for funding are currently undergoing assessment. The implications of the outcome of the EU referendum for this funding programme are as yet unclear.

- (b) A range of EU Directives have provided benefits for public health and well-being in the North of Ireland. Examples of these include provision for freedom of movement for healthcare professionals across the EU area, allowing HSC organisations to employ doctors and nurses from outside the UK to address staff shortages here; access to cross border health care services, with the provision of the European Health Insurance card (EHIC) for people from here travelling in the EU area; mutual recognition of prescriptions, which allows for prescriptions written in another EU country to be dispensed here; steps to improve safety of medicines and medical devices; and improvements to public health outcomes through measures to reduce tobacco consumption among younger people.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to reopen the respite facilities in Aldergrove House, Newry.
(AQW 2252/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Building and refurbishment work on Aldergrove House started in June 2016 to bring the building up to the standard set out by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) for the provision and delivery of respite.

It is anticipated that this work will be completed by the end of July 2016 and the facility will re-open once RQIA registration is achieved.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has considered upgrading the South West Acute Hospital in order to provide more services locally.

(AQW 2256/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I refer the member to the recent answer provided to AQW 1297/16-21.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of access to cancer treatment for patients living in Fermanagh.

(AQW 2257/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Patients in Fermanagh have access to the full range of local cancer services provided by the Western Health and Social Care Trust; including surgery, chemotherapy and specialist palliative care, servicing a total population of approximately 300,000. Patients will also benefit from the new radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital when it becomes operational later this year.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Health to detail the funding awarded by her Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2258/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Capital Investment is provided to Health Trust areas to develop and maintain the HSC estate which is accessed by patients and clients across the North on the basis of need and not by parliamentary constituency. The table below details capital funding allocated to the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

Year	Facility	Funding
2013/14	Everton Complex	£189k
2014/15	Everton Complex	£197k
2015/16	Everton Complex	£115k

- (ii) Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Public Health Agency provide revenue funding to a wide range of regional services across Belfast; the vast majority of programmes are funded at a Belfast-wide level and it is not possible to identify specific funding for localities such as the Ardoyne area.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1000/16-21; whether she will publish the review.

(AQW 2274/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The review of GP-led primary care services was published in March and is available on the Department of Health's website at <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/review-gp-led-primary-care-services.pdf>.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of weekly hours the GP Out-of-Hours service was available in Limavady; broken down over the last two years.

(AQW 2275/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: GP out of hours services in the Western Trust area are provided by Western Urgent Care across five bases – Altnagelvin, Enniskillen, Limavady, Omagh and Strabane.

The number of weekly hours worked in the GP out of hours base in Limavady, in each of the last two years, are shown in Tables 1 and 2 overleaf.

Table 2: GP hours worked, per week, in Limavady Out of Hours base 1st July 2014 – 28th June 2015

Week commencing (2014)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2014)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked
6 Jul	47	5 Oct	56	4 Jan	62	5 Apr	52
13 Jul	63	12 Oct	48	11 Jan	61	12 Apr	82
20 Jul	52	19 Oct	56	18 Jan	52	19 Apr	56
27 Jul	25	26 Oct	54	25 Jan	58	26 Apr	53
3 Aug	33	2 Nov	54	1 Feb	60	3 May	54.5
10 Aug	54.5	9 Nov	54.5	8 Feb	58	10 May	57
17 Aug	54	16 Nov	60	15 Feb	60	17 May	51
24 Aug	52	23 Nov	60	22 Feb	52	24 May	43
31 Aug	61	30 Nov	56	1 Mar	56	31 May	67
7 Sep	53	7 Dec	52	8 Mar	51.5	7 Jun	56
14 Sep	56.5	14 Dec	44	15 Mar	50.5	14 Jun	44

Week commencing (2014)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2014)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked
21 Sep	53	21 Dec	56	22 Mar	65	21 Jun	42
28 Sep	56	28 Dec	70	29 Mar	48	28 Jun	52

Source: Western Urgent Care

Table 3: GP hours worked, per week, in Limavady Out of Hours base 29th June 2015 – 26th June 2016

Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2015)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2016)	GP hours worked	Week commencing (2016)	GP hours worked
5 Jul	30	4 Oct	56	3 Jan	71	3 Apr	46
12 Jul	48	11 Oct	46	10 Jan	48	10 Apr	43
19 Jul	48	18 Oct	47	17 Jan	49.5	17 Apr	49.5
26 Jul	50	25 Oct	45	24 Jan	50.5	24 Apr	41
2 Aug	46.5	1 Nov	43.5	31 Jan	36.5	1 May	40
9 Aug	34.5	8 Nov	46.5	7 Feb	28	8 May	43
16 Aug	36.5	15 Nov	56	14 Feb	54	15 May	42.5
23 Aug	23	22 Nov	52	21 Feb	38.5	22 May	39.5
30 Aug	42	29 Nov	46.5	28 Feb	44	29 May	26
6 Sep	68	6 Dec	45	6 Mar	48.5	5 Jun	49
13 Sep	45	13 Dec	36.5	13 Mar	46.5	12 Jun	44.5
20 Sep	34.5	20 Dec	51	20 Mar	58	19 Jun	27.5
27 Sep	39.5	27 Dec	38	27 Mar	44	26 Jun	20

Source: Western Urgent Care

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail how many doctors were on duty for the Doctor on Call service in Limavady on each weekend (i) in 2015; and (ii) 2016 to date.

(AQW 2278/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: GP Out of Hours services in the Western Trust area are provided by Western Urgent Care across five bases – Altnagelvin, Enniskillen, Limavady, Omagh and Strabane.

The number of doctors on duty each weekend in 2015 and 2016 in Limavady are not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The number of doctors on duty in the Limavady base during a typical weekend, during 2015 and 2016 up to 1st June, are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Planned number of GPs on duty during a typical weekend during 2015 and 2016 to date

Out of Hours base	Time	Planned number of GPs
Limavady	08:00 -10:59	1
	11:00- 15:59	2
	16:00 – 23:00	1

Source: Western Urgent Care

Also, as GPs can work sessions of varying durations during out of hours provision, the number of doctors on duty each weekend would not provide any valuable analysis with regard to service provision. The number of GP hours worked each weekend provides a much better indication of service delivery; the numbers of GP hours worked each weekend are shown in Tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2: Number of GP hours worked in Limavady Out of Hours base on each weekend in 2015

Weekend (2015)	GP hours worked						
3-4 Jan	40	4-5 Apr	40	4-5 Jul	14	3-4 Oct	40
10-11 Jan	40	11-12 Apr	40	11-12 Jul	40	10-11 Oct	30
17-18 Jan	40	18-19 Apr	40	18-19 Jul	30	17-18 Oct	35
24-25 Jan	40	25-26 Apr	38.5	25-26 Jul	35	24-25 Oct	35
31 Jan-1 Feb	40	2-3 May	40	1-2 Aug	30.5	31 Oct-1 Nov	35
7-8 Feb	40	9-10 May	30	8-9 Aug	30.5	7-8 Nov	34.5
14-15 Feb	40	16-17 May	35	15-16 Aug	24.5	14-15 Nov	40
21-22 Feb	40	23-24 May	35	22-23 Aug	19	21-22 Nov	40
28 Feb-1 Mar	40	30-31 May	40	29-30 Aug	30	28-29 Nov	35.5
7-8 Mar	37.5	6-7 Jun	40	5-6 Sep	40	5-6 Dec	29
14-15 Mar	40	13-14 Jun	36	12-13 Sep	26	12-13 Dec	30.5
21-22 Mar	40	20-21 Jun	32	19-20 Sep	22	19-20 Dec	35
28-29 Mar	38	27-28 Jun	40	26-27 Sep	27	26-27 Dec	27

Source: Western Urgent Care

Table 3: Number of GP hours worked in Limavady Out of Hours bases on each weekend in 2016

Weekend (2016)	GP hours worked	Weekend (2016)	GP hours worked
2-3 Jan	40	2-3 Apr	19
9-10 Jan	28	9-10 Apr	27
16-17 Jan	35	16-17 Apr	35
23-24 Jan	37.5	23-24 Apr	29
30-31 Jan	32.5	30 Apr-1 May	30
6-7 Feb	20	7-8 May	32
13-14 Feb	40	14-15 May	36
20-21 Feb	30.5	21-22 May	35.5
27-28 Feb	36	28-29 May	22
5-6 Mar	31	4-5 Jun	35
12-13 Mar	32	11-12 Jun	35
19-20 Mar	31	18-19 Jun	27.5
26-27 Mar	40	25-26 Jun	20

Source: Western Urgent Care

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Health for an update on the working group on fatal foetal abnormalities.
(AQW 2280/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: With the agreement of the Minister of Justice, a Working Group which will consider the issue of fatal fetal abnormality has now been established. The Group will meet on 14 July 2016 and, in accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Group will report to me and the Justice Minister by September 2016.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Health to outline her plans for the future of Westlands Residential Home, Cookstown.
(AQW 2289/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decisions have yet been taken on proposals for the future role and function of statutory residential care homes, including the proposals for Westlands residential care home in Cookstown.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health to detail the total cost of treating diabetes-related conditions, over each of the last ten years.

(AQW 2303/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The treatment of diabetes-related conditions is complex and requires inputs from across a range of programmes of care. Care for people living with diabetes is provided in a number of settings which can include hospitals and primary care services. Therefore the total cost of care cannot be calculated based on currently available financial information.

However, current estimates based on the north of Ireland and Britain suggest that approximately 10 percent of the total Health and Social Care budget is spent on treating diabetes and related conditions. In the north of Ireland this equates to approximately £1million per day.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health what proportion of people aged 12 years or over have been invited to have their eyes screened once a year, over each of the last three years.

(AQW 2304/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed that the question relates to the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme (DRSP). The information requested is not centrally available; however figures from the Public Health Agency (PHA) on the uptake of the DRSP for patients aged 12 years and over, listed on the diabetes register of each general practice, are available and detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Uptake of the Diabetic Eye Screening Programme for Patients Aged 12 Years and Over

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Uptake of the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme	74%	76%	74%

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health how many people under the age of 16 years received treatment in hospitals for excessive alcohol consumption, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2307/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is assumed that this question refers to the number of people under the age of 16 that were treated for excessive alcohol consumption in emergency care departments.

Information on the number people under the age of 16 that received treatment for excessive alcohol consumption in emergency care departments is not available.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of assaults on staff in the South West Acute Hospital, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2312/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The total number of assaults on staff in the South West Acute Hospital recorded in each of the last three years is as follows:-

	Year Ending 31 March 2014	Year Ending 31 March 2015	Year Ending 31 March 2016
Physical	28	37	38
Verbal	22	39	15
Total	50	76	53

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Health to detail the bonuses paid to staff in his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2317/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The following table sets out bonus payments awarded to staff in my Department in each of the last five years:

Year	Amount Paid Under NICS Special Bonus Scheme	
	No of Staff	Total Amount
2010/11	57	£27,300
2011/12	69	£24,750
2012/13	61	£21,735
2013/14	68	£31,120

Year	Amount Paid Under NICS Special Bonus Scheme	
	No of Staff	Total Amount
2014/15	21	£13,150

The NICS Special Bonus scheme allows Departments to reward exceptional performance in particularly demanding tasks or situations at any time in the year. Senior Civil Servants are excluded from receiving bonus payments under the Special Bonus Scheme.

The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) is the only Departmental Arms Length Body operating a bonus scheme. Information on the bonuses paid to its staff over the last four years only is available and is set out in the table below:

YEAR	BHSCT Bonus Scheme	
	No of Staff	Total Amount
2012/13	60	£32,000
2013/14	60	£34,000
2014/15	60	£29,000
2015/16	60	£35,699

The BHSCT's Bonus Scheme reward its Agenda for Change (AfC) staff employed in the catering department of Knockbracken Foods. The Scheme was introduced in 2001 to achieve combined goals of safety, quality and productivity.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Middleton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the potential reuse and refurbishment of Waterside Railway Station.
(AQW 219/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): Translink is continuing to negotiate with the owners of the old site in relation to its purchase. In the meantime it has appointed an Integrated Design Team Leaders to take forward a Feasibility Study, which commenced in January 2016, to look at two options:

- A new station on the current site
- Redevelopment of the old original Waterside Train Station

Translink has created initial conceptual designs but more work is needed on both options. It is hoped that an Economic Appraisal will be submitted to my Department towards the end of 2016. The current completion date for the project is 2020 but this clearly depends on clarification of budgets, and my Department is pursuing EU funding sources.

My Department's initial application for funding towards the development of a new multi-modal transport hub in the North West under the Sustainable Transport Objective of the INTERREG VA programme was approved on 8 March.

Following approval of this initial application my Department is now engaged in the process of developing a second, more detailed application which will be submitted to the Managing Authority for assessment by the 22 August.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Infrastructure what plans he has to invest in the Derry to Belfast railway line.
(AQW 355/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am committed to the development of the Derry to Belfast railway line. The current planned expenditure for the projects on the line due to complete this year is £47.2 million. This is shown in Table A below.

Translink is considering other projects to improve services on the line but firstly needs to carry out feasibility and other studies before Business Cases would be prepared for any of them. Depending on the outcome of the Business Cases and the next budget I hope to take them forward. These total £17.5m and are shown in Table B.

My department is currently preparing an application for EU funding through the INTERREG Programme to support the construction of a new multimodal transport hub in the North West. It is estimated that the total cost of the project will be around £25m and will incorporate a range of travel and community services into the final design. This is included in Table B.

Table A

Project	Current Status	Estimated Cost	Estimated Completion date
Coleraine - Derry Track Renewal - Phase 2	Construction	£46.4m	December 2016

Project	Current Status	Estimated Cost	Estimated Completion date
Ballymoney Park & Ride Extension	Construction	£0.5m	June 2016
Whiteabbey Park & Ride Extension	Construction	£0.3m	September 2016

Table B

Project	Current Status	Estimated Cost	Estimated Completion date
Bellarena Permanent Way Storage & Stabling Facility	Feasibility - Outline Design	£2.5m	October 2018
Ballymena Bus / Rail Integrated Station (subject to feasibility)	Feasibility - Outline Design	£5.5m	July 2021
Cullybackey Park & Ride (subject to Cullybackey level crossing feasibility study)	Design	£0.5m	February 2020
Donegall Quay - Yorkgate Dualling Phase 1 (subject to Yorkgate Interchange Programme)	Economic Appraisal being considered by DoF	£9m	August 2020
Multimodal transport hub in the North West	Construction to commence 2018	£25m	2020

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail whether his Department plans to increase safety provisions on the A46 Loughshore Road.

(AQW 1886/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI in Western Division plan to undertake a number of safety improvement projects on this route.

In the current financial year resurfacing and surface dressing will be undertaken to improve safety at a number of locations:

- surface dress a total of 6 km on three sections of the A46, one of these is on a bend near Carrickreagh and the other two sections are at Magho.
- propose to provide 2km of resurfacing on three sections of this route at Blaney, Cobystown and Portnacloyaduff (Corrigan's corner).

Full details of all schemes proposed within the Council area can be viewed at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

If there are any other locations on this route where you believe a safety improvement should be considered please contact Colm McElholm in Western Division's Network Development Section on 028 8225 4164 and he will arrange to have them considered when he is developing the Local Transport and Safety Measures programme for 2017-2019.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail whether his Department plans to increase safety provisions on the A509 Belturbet to Enniskillen road.

(AQW 1894/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI in Western Division plan to undertake a number of safety improvement projects on this route.

In the current financial year, a short section of carriageway resurfacing on A509 at Teemore crossroads will provide an improved road surface at that junction.

The draft 2016-2108 Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) programme presented to Fermanagh and Omagh Council last Autumn also contains two projects:

- A large scale improvement scheme to widen and realign the A509 carriageway at Derryhawlaght between Bellnaleck and Derrylin, estimated to cost approximately £1.2 million.
- A junction improvement scheme to reduce road traffic collisions that have been occurring on A509 at Montiagh Cross roads.

Completion of these two projects will be subject to sufficient resource funding being available.

Full details of all schemes proposed within the Council area can be viewed at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

If there are any other locations on this route where you believe a safety improvement should be considered please contact Colm McElholm in Western Division's Network Development Section on 028 8225 4164 and he will arrange to have them considered when he is developing the LTSM programme for 2017-2019.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any plans Transport NI has to alleviate vehicle pressure at the Dark Hedges.

(AQW 1900/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My officials from TransportNI are currently involved in discussions with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and other interested stakeholders regarding a number of matters, in the vicinity of the Dark Hedges, including traffic management issues.

The discussions are aimed at providing a package of measures that will improve the experience for visitors to this increasingly popular tourist attraction. Among the issues being considered are improved car/coach parking facilities, pedestrian provision and prohibition of vehicles on Bregagh Road, where the Dark Hedges are situated.

Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council is the lead partner in these discussions and it is hoped, with positive input from TransportNI, a package of measures can be agreed and delivered that will improve the overall experience for local people in the area and visitors to the Dark Hedges.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) how many schools have a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of their campus; (ii) how many of these are operational at schools located in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area; and (iii) what is the required criteria to qualify for such a limit.

(AQW 1932/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) The following schools have a 20mph speed limit in the vicinity of their campus.
- De la Salle College, Belfast
 - Holychild Primary School, Belfast
 - Holy Cross Primary School, Belfast
 - St Bernadettes Primary School, Belfast
 - Bunscoil An Tseibhe Duibh Primary School, Belfast
 - Botanic Primary School, Belfast
 - Holy Trinity Primary School, Belfast
 - Gaelscoil Na Mona, Belfast
 - Templepatrick Primary School, Lylehill Road, Templepatrick
 - Hezlett Primary School on the A2 Mussenden Road, Articlave
 - Kilmoyle Primary School at the junction of the B67 Benvardin Road and U56 Kilmoyle Road outside Ballybogey.
 - Clonalig Primary School, Newry
 - Moyallen Primary School, Portadown
 - St Peter's Primary School, Collegelands
 - Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh – Ballycolman Estate, Strabane
 - Devenish College - Derrycharra, Enniskillen
 - Holy Trinity Primary School - Cornagrade, Enniskillen.
 - Magherafelt Primary School – Queens Ave, Magherafelt.
- (ii) There are no 20mph speed limits operational at schools located in the Ards and North Down Borough Council area.
- (iii) TransportNI has a comprehensive policy and procedure in place for traffic engineers to use

when considering safety measures at local schools. As well as containing measures to enhance road safety such as signing, road markings and lay-bys, it also contains the criteria required for the installation of part time 20 mph speed limits. The policy contains an assessment sheet that considers a number of factors such as existing speeds, collision statistics and other economic and demographic factors. These are used to prioritise individual schools and identify those with the most pressing need.

The policy and assessment form can be accessed at:

www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/road-safety-schools-rsppg-e070

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any plans for footpath resurfacing in (i) Portadown; (ii) Lurgan; and (iii) Banbridge in 2016/17.

(AQW 1946/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has developed an extensive resurfacing programme for footpaths in the Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge areas where it is planned to carry out selected lengths of resurfacing at the locations noted below.

Portadown

- Brownstown West Estate including Tullyroan Drive, Tullyroan Gardens and Hobson Park
- Seagoe Park
- Mullenakill Park
- Bleary Road (through village)
- Tandragee Road (Annagh Bridge to Woodview)
- Corcrair Drive
- Marian Avenue

Lurgan

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------|
| ■ The Willows | ■ Sandhill Park |
| ■ Pines Park | ■ Greenhill Park |
| ■ McCormack Drive | ■ Meadowvale |

Banbridge

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| ■ Marville Park | ■ Laganvale |
| ■ Brookfield Avenue | ■ Thornhill Drive |
| ■ Iveagh Drive | ■ Parklands |

You will also be aware that my Department continues to work with Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council and the Department for Communities on a Council led scheme to deliver extended public realm works in Portadown and Lurgan town centres to enhance footways and street furniture.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned in the Bangor area over the next financial year. (AQW 1957/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Bangor area over the next financial year.

However, should additional funds become available it is the intention to progress with the provision of two pedestrian refuge islands on Ballycrochan Road, near Deansfield junction and in the general area of Knightsbridge, to improve pedestrian safety.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned for Holywood over the next financial year. (AQW 1960/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Holywood area over the next financial year.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned for Donaghadee over the next financial year. (AQW 1961/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Donaghadee area over the next financial year.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given it may result in a significant reduction in the number of drivers, whether he has any plans to review the cost of the new taxi driver test

(AQW 1979/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department of Finance's Managing Public Money NI (MPMNI) states that when setting fees for public services, the financial objective should be on the basis of 'full cost recovery'. The fees charged for both the taxi theory and taxi practical tests are based on ensuring the costs of these tests are fully recovered.

To date there is no evidence that the current fees will result in a significant reduction in the number of taxi drivers, however, I will seek to ensure that the costs associated with these tests are kept to a minimum and the fees regularly reviewed

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure who is responsible for the maintenance of the Termon river; and for his assessment of the impact of the flooding on the villages of Pettigo and Tullyhommon over the last five years.

(AQW 2016/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Termon River forms part of the border with the South and is straddled by the twin cross-border villages of Tullyhommon and Pettigo. The watercourse in question is undesignated under the terms of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 and consequently ongoing maintenance rests with the riparian landowners.

Rivers Agency has no record of dwellings or property being flooded here by the Termon River, however sandbags were deployed during the flooding events of December 2015 and January 2016, and placed at two houses, as a precautionary measure. There has been flooding to surrounding roads including the A35 Pettigo Road and Killynoogan Road.

The Termon River was submitted for designation to the June sitting of the Drainage Council for Northern Ireland and the Drainage Council affirmed Rivers Agency's recommendation not to designate. Restoration of the channel capacity of the Termon River due to lack of maintenance would be best resolved by agreement and if necessary by enforcement under the provisions of Schedule 5 & Schedule 6 of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973.

An old railway arch bridge and a raised railway embankment that crosses the floodplain are significant factors in the cause of drainage debility and Rivers Agency will explore options with Transport NI and the riparian owners to address this issue.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the implications of the result of the EU Referendum for (i) planned infrastructure projects, especially those involving EU or European Investment Bank financing; (ii) all other aspects of his departmental portfolio; and what relevant contingencies are in place.

(AQW 2057/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Clearly, the result of the EU referendum has the potential to detrimentally impact on the delivery of key infrastructure projects on the island. I am working closely with my Executive colleagues to establish and measure the full extent of this impact while exploring options and opportunities to effectively mitigate against it.

The use of EU co-financing for major infrastructure projects has provided important additionalities but this has always formed a part of a broader financial mix involving departmental and NI block funding rather than providing a solitary source of finance.

I remain focused on delivering our strategic infrastructure priorities, including those projects identified in the Fresh Start Agreement as well as the multimodal transport hub in Derry and I am prepared to consider all options available to me in doing so.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 929/16-21; to outline what (i) guidance; and (ii) training is provided to members of staff to be able to deem a dog or animal as dangerous.

(AQW 2078/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The following guidance framework operates within Translink. Carriage of assistance dogs is non-discretionary, i.e. guide dogs, hearing dogs, dogs for the disabled, support dogs and canine partners for independence are permitted to travel at any time.

Railway staff are given guidance and briefed on the Translink Dog/Animal Policy on a one to one basis by their Supervisor. Staff are encouraged to use their discretion in considering the size, breed and temperament of the animal intending to travel.

Guidance in this area is periodically included for bus staff in the course of training in relation to the Certificate of Professional Competence. It is also contained in the bus driver's manual.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when the review into the multi-agency response to flooding conducted by Mr. Alan Strong is likely to be published.

(AQW 2116/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The review into the winter 2015/16 floods includes consideration of the current management regime to control water levels for Lough Neagh. In addition to this Alan is also currently meeting and corresponding with residents, businesses and farmers who live and work along the Upper and Lower Bann and around Lough Neagh and Lough Erne to hear about their concerns and the effect the flooding has had on their lives.

It is my understanding that the report of the Winter Flooding Review into the winter flooding events of 2015/16 will be published in early autumn 2016.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his Department's plans for the development of St Lucia Barracks, Omagh.

(AQW 2154/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: St. Lucia is one of the four former military bases gifted to the NI Executive under the Hillsborough Castle Agreement, February 2010, with the expectation that the proceeds from the disposal of the sites would be used to meet exceptional resource pressures.

Only part of the site has so far transferred to my Department. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) currently retains ownership of the Historic Core to enable them to resolve legal limitations prior to transferring the remaining lands.

Officials are liaising with the MoD and other key stakeholders to identify options and to develop plans for the future of the St. Lucia site in readiness of the legal matters being resolved.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to provide an update on the provision of audio recordings of benefit appeal tribunals, particularly in respect of hearings at court houses where the mechanisms are already in place.

(AQW 1722/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): Following a review by the Business Consultancy Service into the administrative processes of the Appeals Service (TAS), a project was initiated by the Department for Social Development in December 2015 with the aim to transform current TAS operations.

Proposals to improve business processes, including the introduction of audio recordings, are currently being developed and any proposal that will impact on appellants will be considered in conjunction with the President of the Appeals Service and appellant representatives.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Lord Morrow asked the Assembly Commission whether Assembly secretariat are entitled to (i) mileage; and (ii) other expenses; and to detail their entitlement.

(AQW 1874/16-21)

Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

- (i) The Assembly Commission makes provision for Mileage Allowance Payments (MAPs) to be paid to its employees when using their own vehicle(s) for business journeys. MAPs are paid at a rate of 45 pence per mile (for the first 10,000 miles) and then at a rate of 25 pence per mile thereafter for the use of a personal car on Assembly business. These rates are approved by HMRC.
- (ii) The Commission also meets the cost of expenses necessarily incurred by its employees on Assembly business. These include:
 - a Subsistence
 - i 24 hour subsistence - £18.30
 - ii. Over 10 hours subsistence - £9.30
 - iii. Over 5 hours subsistence - £4.25
 - iv. Personal Allowance £5 for each 24 hour period
 - b Hotel accommodation – hotel accommodation costs on Assembly business are booked directly by the Commission. There are maximum limits for hotel rates (on a B&B basis and including VAT) per night as follows:

■ Central London	£175
■ Rest of UK	£120
■ Rep of Ireland	£150
■ Europe	£185
■ USA	£265
 - c Travel (excluding travel by private car) - flights, train journeys, buses, etc. are booked centrally by the Commission.
 - Flights – all domestic flights are booked in Economy Class. For long-haul flights over 7 hours, flights may be booked as Premium Economy/Business Class. On long haul flights, payment for airport lounges may be allowed if the connection time at the transit airport is over 2 hours. Overnight stays for one night should be based on “hand luggage only”;
 - Trains - for travel by train (typically between Belfast and Dublin), the Commission purchases “Enterprise” tickets for use by employees on approved business journeys;
 - Car parking – the actual cost of car parking can be reimbursed on presentation of a valid receipt.

Mr McKay asked the Assembly Commission whether there are plans to introduce a public petition page on the Assembly website, similar to other jurisdictions.

(AQW 2071/16-21)

Mr Attwood (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): During the last mandate, the Committee on Procedures agreed a report on the Review of Public Petitions Procedures (NIA 305/11-16) which recommended, amongst other things, that the existing public petitions process should be enhanced by the inclusion of an e-petitions facility to permit submission of petitions without requiring sponsorship of a political party. On 1 March 2016 the Assembly approved both this and the other recommendations in the report.

The current Committee on Procedures is giving consideration to these recommendations with a view to introducing an e-petitions facility in due course. The Assembly Commission will provide the necessary resources to facilitate whatever e-petition facility is agreed and introduced.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 22 July 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 52276/11-16, to detail (i) the membership of the research advisory board; (ii) its remit; (iii) the selection criteria for membership and methodology for their selection; and (iv) whether the board were remunerated, and if so, what they received.
(AQW 166/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The research advisory group members represented the following organisations:

- Education and Training Inspectorate
- Greater Village Regeneration Trust
- PSNI
- Loughshore Education Resource Centre
- Belfast Education and Library Board
- Ulster University
- Ballybeen Women's Centre
- Sharing Education programme
- Upper Springfield and Whiterock Integrated Partnership
- North Belfast Interface Monitoring Group
- A Principal at Secondary Level School
- University of Queensland – international advisor
- OFMDFM [now Executive Office]

This informal team was selected and appointed by the academic researchers in QUB and included officials in our Department. The advisory group were not remunerated for taking part in this informal group.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the basis on which MJM Group was chosen as the successful bidder for the Shackleton site.
(AQW 584/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Proposals to purchase Shackleton were assessed against four criteria – Job Creation; Financial Offer to Purchase the Site; Environmental Benefits; and Community Benefits. Via an open and transparent process the MJM Group was allocated the highest score and was therefore selected as the Preferred Purchaser.

Mr Poots asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given the success of the move of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show to the Maze Long Kesh site, to outline how they plan to improve the access and egress at the site.
(AQO 8/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: An inter-agency meeting was held on 29 June 2016 at which site transport issues were discussed. Possible remedial actions were considered and the group will meet again in August to discuss potential traffic management improvements.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the total travel and related costs of their Department in 2015-16.
(AQW 1142/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The following table sets out the travel and related costs incurred by the Department during the financial year 2015-16. Information has been provided separately for the three overseas offices (Office of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Brussels, Northern Ireland Bureau Washington and Northern Ireland Bureau China).

	Total Cost for Department (£)	Costs for Overseas Offices (£)	Costs excluding Overseas Offices (£)
Travel Costs	317,081	63,797	253,284
Related Costs	79,325	32,730	46,595

Related costs include accommodation and subsistence costs and allowances. These figures relate to all travel included in Departmental accounts including officials, Ministers and non-staff (excluding Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry) paid for by the Department.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the process for establishing each of the agreed baselines, indicators and measures in the Racial Equality Strategy.
(AQW 1773/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Advisory Group which was convened to review the Good Relations Indicators agreed that, to capture the full extent of the outcomes of the Racial Equality Strategy, a set of racial equality indicators separate to the good relations indicators would be required.

A Racial Equality Indicator Review advisory group was established and included representatives from key government departments, various non-government organisations and key stakeholders to provide expert advice and guidance in relation to indicators.

The indicators were developed under four outcomes – these represent the outcomes expected if the shared aims in the Racial Equality Strategy are achieved. The outcomes are:

- Equality of service provision
- Elimination of prejudice, racism and hate crime
- Increased participation, representation and belonging
- Cultural diversity is celebrated

The indicators were consulted on between 19 June and 10 October 2014. The consultation ran at the same time as the consultation on the Racial Equality Strategy.

Mr Boylan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Social Investment Fund.
(AQO 124/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Funding of £70 million is committed to projects that will make a real difference to people's lives.

31 projects worth £44 million have commenced delivery, 13 of which are up and running investing £25 million into local communities.

Over 500 people are currently benefitting from training or paid work placements through an investment of £18.5million, with 33 jobs already secured.

1200 participants are benefitting from early intervention projects with £5.7million allocated to support physical, intellectual, social and emotional development.

Over 300 people are benefitting from dedicated educational support projects worth £5.5million.

Additionally a range of capital projects will provide much needed structural community support.

Ms Seeley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Racial Equality Strategy.
(AQW 1808/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Racial Equality Strategy was approved by the Executive and published on 10 December 2015. A key delivery mechanism of the Racial Equality Strategy is the establishment of the Racial Equality Subgroup. The membership has recently been finalised and the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup is currently being arranged. The establishment of Departmental Racial Equality Champions and an associated shared learning forum will facilitate a cohesive approach to establishing appropriate ethnic monitoring. These Champions have been identified and will liaise directly with the Subgroup.

Ms Seeley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their plan, under the Programme for Government outcome 3, to address the acute poverty and in-work poverty of the migrant community, who comprise the majority of the ethnic minority population.

(AQW 1811/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: As stated in the published Programme for Government Framework, Outcome 3 ('We have a more equal society'), means creating more opportunities for people, and ensuring access to those opportunities regardless of their background. It is also about acknowledging where harmful inequalities exist – and supporting people who face serious issues as a result of them.

In parallel with the current consultation on the Framework, delivery planning processes have been commenced, led by senior officials from across departments. These will involve engagement with relevant stakeholders, and will develop programmes of action to support the achievement of the Outcomes in the Framework.

These plans will be prepared by the autumn. They will be published and subject to a public consultation process.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the panel on paramilitarism.

(AQO 129/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Panel report was published on 7 June. It is a comprehensive report which will inform the development of an Executive action plan aimed at ending paramilitarism. It is our intention to publish the action plan shortly.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether all of the necessary application documents and staff training has been completed for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to commence.

(AQW 1262/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): I can confirm that all necessary systems, controls, application forms, guidance notes and legislation are in place to enable the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund to commence. However as the business case has not been finalised I have instructed my officials to prioritise its submission to the Department of Finance for approval. The EMFF will open immediately after that approval has been secured.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department will work in conjunction with the National Trust and Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council to address the issues with jetties at Coney Island.

(AQW 1619/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Coney Island is privately owned by the National Trust and managed on their behalf by Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council.

DAERA Inland Fisheries have no remit to construct or maintain jetties on Lough Neagh or its islands which includes Coney Island other than those for business purposes at its boathouse at Derrycrow.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline how her Department is addressing environmental damage caused by fuel laundering in Armagh.

(AQW 1794/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Where fuel laundering does occur the waste residue from the operations is toxic and needs to be treated as hazardous waste. Experience shows that fuel laundering waste is indiscriminately flytipped in mainly rural areas. If the waste is not handled and disposed of properly, it can cause serious pollution to the environment, and pose a significant risk to human and animal health. As an example, acid and hydrocarbon waste in rivers will alter the quality of the water and kill its plant and animal life.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) take the lead in respect of dealing with fuel laundering in Northern Ireland. My Department, through the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), is involved via The Organised Crime Task Force and its subgroup led by HMRC, The Cross-Border Fuel Fraud Enforcement Group. Their focus is on developing a strategy for identifying and dealing with the issues associated with Fuel Laundering on both sides of the border.

The Environmental Crime Unit of the NIEA will also investigate unauthorised deposits of fuel laundering waste where there is sufficiency of evidence identifying those responsible. Since 2011 the Environmental Crime Unit has reported 12 cases of fuel laundering waste offending to the Public Prosecution Service with a recommendation for prosecution.

In respect of assessing the impact of this illegal activity, NIEA Inspectors will determine the actual or potential environmental impact of the flytipped waste. Sometimes the material remains secured in the flytipped containers, normally Intermediate Bulk Containers (IBCs), and the incident is classified as 'no pollution found'. In other cases, where the waste material leaks from the IBCs, the incident will be confirmed as having an environmental impact. Where necessary, remedial measures, such as the deployment of oil absorbents and/or booms, will be taken. Flytipped fuel laundering waste (FLW) in Northern Ireland is currently cleaned up by the NIEA at significant cost to the taxpayer.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what work will be commissioned in preparation for any extra powers which will come to her Department as a consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

(AQW 1835/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is too early to be definitive about what additional powers are likely to be secured. No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that new opportunities are developed as part of any new arrangements.

A departmental team has been established at senior level to consider the potential implications for my department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. The Head of the Civil Service has also been asked to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and Deputy First Ministers.

This senior team within DAERA will liaise with Whitehall, EU and Irish counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal for Northern Ireland for farmers, the agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors and the environment.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list the improvement in the genetics in livestock sires in the dairy industry; and to list the improvements that will help eradicate bovine TB.

(AQW 1910/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is pleasing to note there is very significant genetic improvement in dairy sires used in the dairy industry. In Northern Ireland it is estimated that the current annual rate of genetic gain in dairy sires, expressed as £PLI, is in the order of £14. This represents the additional profit each milking daughter will make as new sires become available to the industry each year. The annual increase in the genetic merit of dairy sires being achieved comprises of gains in the potential for production (e.g. milk solids) and non production (e.g. fertility and lifespan) traits in dairy herd replacements.

In January 2016, TB Advantage, a new genetic index was introduced by AHDB Dairy to help UK dairy farmers make informed decisions to breed cows which have an improved resistance to bovine tuberculosis (bTB). The index indicates the degree of resistance to bTB a bull is predicted to pass on to his offspring and is expressed on a scale which typically runs from -3 to +3. AHDB Dairy report that for every +1 point in the index, 1% fewer daughters are expected to become infected during a TB breakdown.

Breeding cattle with a reduced susceptibility to bTB is a long-term approach to disease control and its role is being considered as part of the proposals being developed by the TB Strategic Partnership Group which are designed to achieve the greatest reduction in the level and cost of bovine TB in the shortest possible time. All other existing and emerging control measures therefore remain critically important to protect cattle against bTB, irrespective of the choice of bull in dairy production systems.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the total value of Single Farm Payments allocated to the farming community in West Tyrone in each year since 2011; and whether, following the recent EU referendum result, her Department or the British Treasury will be able to replace or secure a similar level of financial support for local farmers in West Tyrone over the next five years.

(AQW 2236/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The total value of Single Farm Payments (and the Schemes which replaced SFP in 2015 – Basic Payment, Greening and Young Farmer) to farm businesses in West Tyrone in each of the last five years was:

■ 2011/12	£37,362,000
■ 2012/13	£34,184,000
■ 2013/14	£38,727,000
■ 2014/15	£33,856,000
■ 2015/16	£33,320,000
■ Total	£177,449,000

The support framework that will apply to the agricultural industry following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation and agreement within the UK, and between the UK and the EU, over the course of the next number of years. I can assure you that I will be fully engaged in those processes, seeking to ensure that the needs of our local farmers are properly reflected in the final arrangements. In the meantime, we continue to access the CAP support regime as normal.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for her assessment of whether business development groups are sufficiently targeted; and (ii) for her assessment of the value of farmers, operating differing schemes, being grouped together.

(AQW 2298/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Currently my Department is delivering the Business Development Group (BDG) Programme to 2941 farmers in 154 groups. At this early stage feedback from group participants has been positive.

The BDG programme is targeted at like-minded farmers who wish to develop their farm business over a 5 year period . As the programme requires on-going commitment throughout the year, targeting farmers from the same sector and grouping them from similar postcode areas is enabling farmers to work together in groups close to their home farm. Allocating farmers by this method has been shown to promote peer to peer learning and improve the uptake of new technology which leads to an increase in business efficiency. In addition farmers were also grouped together on the basis of their participation in an integrated supply chain. This assists farmers to strengthen their supply chain linkages.

However where a farmer feels they are gaining limited benefit from membership of a group then they should discuss this with their group facilitator initially. Following this discussion the farmer has the option to register their concerns in writing and request a transfer to an alternative group.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what new measures she is going to introduce to help farmers bring land previously flooded back into full productivity.
(AQW 2300/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In March 2016, an Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme was established by the Executive for non-domestic properties, including farms, to cover the period 7 November 2015 until 31 January 2016. A payment of £1,000 was available to farm businesses which met specific criteria and which were significantly affected as a result of sustained high levels of flood water observed and recorded on Lough Neagh and Upper Lough Erne over this period. The Scheme is being administered by the Councils and 543 applications were received from farm businesses by the scheme closing date on 16 May 2016. Councils have issued the payments to all eligible applicants.

Advisers from the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) are currently undertaking an assessment of the impact of the extreme flooding event on farm businesses in the areas adjacent to Lough Neagh and Upper Lough Erne, which were worst affected. CAFRE Advisers are also providing advice to these farm businesses, on practical measures to mitigate the impact of the extreme flooding event. My Department is also working collaboratively with the Department for Infrastructure as part of the wider Winter Floods Review. It is expected that recommendations from this review and the CAFRE assessment will be available in the autumn and these will be used to inform the development of measures to provide future help to farm businesses affected adversely by flooding.

Department for Communities

Mr Dickson asked the Minister for Communities whether he intends to bring forward reform to licensing laws to allow the hospitality industry to maximise local and tourism income during the holidays.
(AQW 1527/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): Alcohol is not an ordinary product and the sale of it must be regulated to ensure the protection of public health and the preservation of public order.

I recognise that certain aspects of liquor licensing law in Northern Ireland are in need of reform and I have copied a paper to my Executive colleagues seeking agreement to introduce a Licensing Bill.

Provisions in the draft Bill mainly flow from the consultation carried out by one of my predecessors in 2012.

The Bill includes a number of measures to tackle practices which may encourage alcohol misuse, safeguards for children and young people and some minor changes to opening hours.

In recent years, drinking patterns in Northern Ireland have changed. 70% of drink is now sold for consumption at home rather than in the relatively controlled environment of a public house. It is important that our legislation is updated to take account of these changes.

When I have received comments from my Executive colleagues and agreement to the introduction of the Bill I will publish full details of the measures contained in the Bill.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for Communities how each Department and arm's-length bodies will be measured against compliance and progress of the Racial Equality Strategy; and (i) how; and (ii) how often this information will be collated and published.
(AQW 1772/16-21)

Mr Givan: A key delivery mechanism of the Racial Equality Strategy is the establishment of the Racial Equality Subgroup. Its membership has recently been finalised and the inaugural meeting of the Subgroup is currently being arranged.

The Subgroup will function as a strong voice within government on issues specifically affecting minority ethnic people, migrants and race relations. A key function of the Subgroup will be to liaise with relevant departments and other key stakeholders to monitor compliance and progress of the Strategy. For example, ethnic monitoring is key to tackling racial inequalities and racism.

The establishment of Departmental Racial Equality Champions and an associated shared learning forum will facilitate a cohesive approach to establishing appropriate ethnic monitoring.

The Champions will liaise directly with the Subgroup. It will be an issue for the Subgroup how best it publish its findings and recommendations from this process.

Department of Education

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Education to outline the anticipated age profile of those teachers who are likely to secure permanent teaching positions following the Investing in the Teacher Workforce Scheme.

(AQW 2094/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The anticipated age profile of those teachers who are likely to secure permanent teaching positions following the Investing in the Teacher Workforce Scheme is not known at this stage.

However, based upon GTCNI data regarding the age profile of graduates from the years 2012 to 2015 (2016 data not yet available), the estimate of the age profile of teachers is provided in the table.

Number and percentage of teaching graduates between 2012 and 2015 by age as at June 2016.

	Number	Percentage
24 and under	773	25.7%
25 to 29	1748	58.1%
30 to 34	281	9.3%
35 to 39	93	3.1%
40 to 44	50	1.7%
45 to 49	40	1.3%
50 to 54	19	0.6%
55 +	7	0.2%
Total	3011	100%

Source: General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland.

The table above gives the number of people registered with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland who graduated between 2012 and 2015 either in Northern Ireland or elsewhere. Please note, these figures include all graduates and therefore also include those in permanent teaching positions who would not be eligible to apply for these vacancies.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for not progressing the nurture units for Scoil An Droichid and Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagain.

(AQW 2169/16-21)

Mr Weir: As this matter is now subject to legal proceedings, it would not be appropriate for me to comment at this time.

Department of Finance

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance when he expects to publish the findings of the Northern Ireland Law Commission's consultation paper on defamation law.

(AQW 118/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): I have recently received Dr Scott's report on the Commission's consultation and will publish it in the near future.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Finance if he will publish the consultation responses received by the Northern Ireland Law Commission for their consultation paper on defamation law, which closed in February 2015.

(AQW 119/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I have recently received Dr Scott's report on the Commission's consultation, and will publish it, and the consultation responses, in the near future.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance whether his plans to borrow more from the Treasury will incorporate greater investment in the North West and West Tyrone.

(AQW 1106/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I would be supportive of any proposals brought forward by Executive colleagues that would lead to greater investment in the North West and West Tyrone.

Indeed the Executive has already expressed its commitment to the A5 and the A6 which will benefit the area.

In terms of funding, the most appropriate option will depend upon the nature of the proposal.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the cost to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency / Central Survey Unit, of potential interviewees declining to take part in their surveys when approached by an interviewer on the doorstep.

(AQW 2001/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance whether his Department will commission a programme of work to identify the legislation imposing European Union directives to be repealed when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 2002/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Each Department has agreed to establish a senior team to assess the implications of the recent referendum regarding membership of the European Union. The departmental teams will feed into an overarching team, which will consider the wider strategic context and report back to the Executive so that it can determine what actions are required.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Finance what plans his Department has to introduce legislation to regulate apartment management companies.

(AQW 2024/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Northern Ireland Law Commission has considered property management in relation to apartments and has recommended the regulation of managing agents, rather than additional regulation for property management companies. Such companies are already subject to regulation under general company law and the issue of additional regulation would not be a matter for my Department, as company law does not fall within its remit.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the implications of the result of the EU Referendum for (i) current and planned projects and programmes funded in conjunction with the European Investment Bank; (ii) public procurement rules; (iii) the process of approving business cases for projects, programmes and schemes; (iv) interreg 2014-2020; and (v) all other aspects of his departmental portfolio; and what relevant contingencies are in place.

(AQW 2037/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The implications of the UK Referendum vote to leave the EU are unclear at this point. This is a matter that I have and will continue to raise with the British and Irish Governments and the EU Commission.

It would therefore be premature to speculate on the possible impact of the Referendum on European Investment Bank business in the medium and long term but, as with EU Structural Funds programmes, it is my focus to ensure that it is business as usual until negotiations are concluded.

I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Executive and Irish Government have affirmed their commitment to the successful implementation of the cross border PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes and I will fully explore the issue of securing the ERDF funding for these programmes with my counterpart in DPER and with the European Commission.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Finance to detail the costs incurred in rebranding the new 9 Executive Departments.

(AQW 2087/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has incurred £14.5k of identifiable costs to date in rebranding the new 9 Executive Departments.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment for the prospects for reducing Corporation Tax in light of the European Union referendum result.

(AQW 2101/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive has made clear its desire to achieve a rate of Corporation Tax of 12.5% by 2018.

Clearly the outcome of the EU referendum changes the context within which we are working and, in light of that, I will bring a report to the Executive which sets out how best to secure the right outcome for our economy, our budget and our people. As Finance Minister I remain committed to the devolution of Corporation Tax powers.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Finance whether consideration is being given to bring forward the planned date for reducing Corporation Tax in light of the European Union referendum result.

(AQW 2102/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive has made clear its desire to achieve a rate of Corporation Tax of 12.5% by 2018.

Clearly the outcome of the EU referendum changes the context within which we are working and, in light of that, I will bring a report to the Executive which sets out how best to secure the right outcome for our economy, our budget and our people. As Finance Minister I remain committed to the devolution of Corporation Tax powers.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Finance whether an assessment been made of the applicability, in the future, of the Azores Judgement in relation to a reduction to the block grant from Westminster, in the event of a reduction in Corporation Tax.
(AQW 2105/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Executive has made clear its desire to achieve a rate of Corporation Tax of 12.5% by 2018.

Clearly the outcome of the EU referendum changes the context within which we are working and, in light of that, I will bring a report to the Executive which sets out how best to secure the right outcome for our economy, our budget and our people. As Finance Minister I remain committed to the devolution of Corporation Tax powers.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance to detail the funding awarded by his Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.
(AQW 2146/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has not provided any funding to either capital or resource projects in the Ardoyne area in the last three years.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Finance to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from his Department; broken down by year for each of the last five years.
(AQW 2162/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department provided funding to the following voluntary and community organisation in Newry and Armagh over the last 5 years under Priority 2.1c of the Public Sector Collaboration theme of the INTERREG IVA Programme. Please note the funding represents total allocations to the project including ERDF, NI match funding, Irish Government funding and Scottish contributions where appropriate.

£000s

Organisation	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Centre for Cross Border Studies	497	259	379	390	18

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance for an update on negotiations relating to the reduction of VAT in the hospitality and tourism sector.
(AQW 2198/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As I stated in the Assembly recently, I believe the current VAT rate of 20% is a burden on the hospitality and tourism sector.

I believe a reduction in Tourism VAT in the North, to match that in the South would create an even playing field for our hoteliers, publicans and restaurateurs. It would boost investment and jobs.

However, EU rules to date have meant that any reduction in tourism VAT would need to be made by the British Government and be applied across the North, and Britain. The British Government has been unwilling to do this so far – despite the case made by my predecessors, the tourism and hospitality sector and others.

More broadly, as I engage further with the British Government in relation to matters of fiscal devolution, I can assure you that I am determined to secure the right outcome for the people of the North.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the progress of the review of deprivation measures which is being carried out jointly by her Department and the Department of Finance.
(AQW 2221/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The review of deprivation measures is being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) with the support of expert users and a Steering Group comprised of representatives from all Government Departments and from a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies and District Councils.

Work to date has focused on investigating the indicators to be included within each of the seven deprivation domains, methodological development and securing access to essential data. It is planned to publish a consultation document in the autumn, setting out detailed proposals for the update, followed by a number of public consultation events.

Thereafter, the updated deprivation measures will be produced with the aim of publishing results in mid 2017, along with detailed supporting guidance for users. Tailored dissemination events will also be scheduled as appropriate to ensure that the results reach the widest possible audience and are both fully understood and utilised.

NISRA is also using its website and social media to keep key stakeholders updated on the progress of the update.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Finance to detail the projected cost to the Executive of providing financial support to each council to assist with rates convergence, in each year from 2015/16.

(AQW 2314/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: No financial support has been, or will be, provided directly to councils to assist with rates convergence.

Instead support is provided through a district rate convergence scheme awarded to ratepayers who experienced a significant increase in their rate bills due to the historic differences that built up in district rates charged by the old legacy councils.

The support scheme is forecast to cost up to £30million in total over the course of the scheme.

The provision being provided will be reviewed later this year to determine if adjustments need to be made to the scheme's application.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance how much his Department and each of its arm's-length bodies spent on consultants in 2015/16.

(AQW 2318/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: My Department has spent £632k on consultants in 2015-16.

The SEUPB spent £50k on consultants in 2015-16. This represents 100% of the costs, which includes contributions from Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and the EU Programmes/ERDF.

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Finance to detail the cost of cutting Corporation Tax to 12.5 per cent.

(AQW 2319/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The costs for devolving Corporation Tax powers to the North have not been agreed with the British Government and engagement on this and other related issues continues.

The latest estimate we have from the Treasury of the net cost of a 12.5% rate to the Executive is £270m in 2020-21, with this falling to around £235m in 2021-22. These estimates were calculated following the British Government's 2016 Budget and reflect policy changes announced at that time. Any further reductions to the UK rate of Corporation Tax would be expected to reduce these estimated costs.

Department of Health

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail where the £3.6 million Resource for Early Intervention and Dementia, allocated under the June Monitoring Round, will be spent.

(AQW 1253/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): Funding received at the June Monitoring Round for the Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) will be used to support the fourteen EITP Projects which aim to improve outcomes for children and young people across the North of Ireland through embedding evidence-based, outcomes-focussed, sustainable and transformational approaches to early intervention and prevention. Funding received at the June Monitoring Round for Dementia will be used to support the Delivering Social Change Dementia Signature Programme, which aims to improve the quality of dementia care and support for people living with dementia and their families and carers.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health to outline what work will be undertaken in preparation for any extra powers which will come to her Department as a consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

(AQW 1882/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union. Therefore it is too early to speculate whether additional powers will come to the north of Ireland.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced.

At the request of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. He has also been asked to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and Deputy First Ministers.

These teams will liaise with counterparts in Dublin, Britain and the EU to ensure we get the best possible deal for the north of Ireland.

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Health whether she has received any assurances from the British Government that extra money will be allocated to the Health Service in the wake of the referendum result.

(AQW 1955/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced.

At the request of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. He has also been asked to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and Deputy First Ministers.

These teams will liaise with counterparts in Dublin, Britain and the EU to ensure we get the best possible deal for the north of Ireland.

To date I have not received any assurances from the British Government that extra money will be allocated for health and social care services.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health whether her Department will commission a programme of work to identify the legislation imposing European Union directives to be repealed when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 2003/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union. Therefore it is too early to speculate whether additional powers will come to the north of Ireland.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced.

At the request of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. He has also been asked to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and Deputy First Ministers.

These teams will liaise with counterparts in Dublin, Britain and the EU to ensure we get the best possible deal for the north of Ireland.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to outline the support in place for travel for parents and siblings of children who have to leave Northern Ireland for medical treatment.

(AQW 2013/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board's (HSCB) Guidance on the Reimbursement of Expenses for Patients Travelling outside the North of Ireland for Treatment/Care, which includes arrangements for repatriation of deceased patients, can be accessed at the following website: http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/download/PUBLICATIONS/TRAVEL%20OUTSIDE%20NI%20FOR%20TREATMENT/Reimbursement_patients_travelling_outside_NI.pdf

The HSCB does not have a system that records repatriations of deceased children.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the policy for repatriation of the bodies of children that pass away while outside Northern Ireland for medical treatment; and (ii) how many repatriations have taken place in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2015/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board's (HSCB) Guidance on the Reimbursement of Expenses for Patients Travelling outside the North of Ireland for Treatment/Care, which includes arrangements for repatriation of deceased patients, can be accessed at the following website: http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/download/PUBLICATIONS/TRAVEL%20OUTSIDE%20NI%20FOR%20TREATMENT/Reimbursement_patients_travelling_outside_NI.pdf

The HSCB does not have a system that records repatriations of deceased children.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health (i) for her assessment of the implications of the result of the European Union referendum for all aspects of her Departmental portfolio; and (ii) to detail what relevant contingencies are in place as a consequence.

(AQW 2038/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union.

Notwithstanding the uncertainty brought about by the EU referendum result, until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that new opportunities are developed as part of any new arrangements.

At the request of the First and Deputy First Ministers, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. He has also been asked to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the First and Deputy First Ministers.

These teams will liaise with counterparts in Dublin, Britain and the EU to ensure we get the best possible deal for the north of Ireland.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to detail how many recommendations from Muscular Dystrophy UK's McCollum Report have been actioned or implemented to date.

(AQW 2073/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Progress has been made in all recommendations with a number of them implemented. I attach at Annex A an update on each of the 15 recommendations contained in the report.

Update on the McCollum report

Annex A

Recommendation	Current position	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 1: A lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions is appointed from within Health and Social Care in North of Ireland to take overall control and be accountable for identifying and fixing the gaps in specialist multidisciplinary neuromuscular care, which require urgent service development.</p>	<p>Michelle Tennyson, Assistant Director, Allied Health Professions and Public Patient Involvement at the Public Health Agency, has been identified as the lead for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions in North of Ireland.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: The North of Ireland Executive and HSC define and fully recognise neuromuscular services as specialist services in order to distinguish the complex muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions as requiring specialist support, which includes different specialisms.</p>	<p>Services for people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy are provided by HSC Trusts on the basis of assessed need and may involve hospital and/or community based services.</p> <p>There is a generic, regional neuromuscular clinic for all age groups provided by the Belfast Trust which is led by an adult neurologist and a paediatric neurologist with an interest in neuromuscular conditions. Occupational therapy services for neuromuscular patients are available in the community. The management of neuromuscular conditions also requires input from other specialties such as cardiology, orthopaedics and respiratory medicine. Other specialties, for example, endocrinology and gastroenterology, may also be involved.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>

Recommendation	Current position	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 3: The North of Ireland Executive ensures that the care advisor post in North of Ireland is secured long term within HSC, and takes urgent steps to create more of these posts. These steps will provide the best possible support and advice for people with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions and will reduce unplanned emergency admissions by investing small amounts to save a large amount in the long term.</p>	<p>The Belfast Trust has funding for 6 Care Advisor Posts – 1 Neurology Care Advisor Coordinator (Manager) and 5 Band 4 care advisors.</p> <p>The Manager and 2 Band 4 Care Advisors are in post. The Trust has recently launched the 3rd recruitment drive for these posts, applications closed at the end of June with 10 applicants.</p> <p>Service at the Neurology Clinics commenced in February 2016. The service will expand as the additional care advisors are recruited.</p> <p>Feedback from service users is positive, and patients particularly like that the advisors are present at the Neurology Clinics.</p> <p>A dedicated Telephone Service (07590447222) has also been established and this went live on 18th January 2016. There will be an answerphone service available for out of hours.</p> <p>A dedicated email service (neurocareadvice@belfasttrust.hscni.net) has also been established.</p> <p>The Trust have indicated that there are increasing patient numbers contacting these services as they become more well know.</p> <p>Leaflets and posters outlining the role of the service have been developed</p> <p>Meetings have been ongoing between the Care Advisor Coordinator and the neurology charities to introduce the service and establish ways to work in partnership.</p>	<p>Part Service in place</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: Health and Social Care Board and the North of Ireland Executive create a steering group for developing specialised neuromuscular services which incorporates the views of people affected by muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions, health professionals, commissioners and the Muscular Dystrophy Campaign.</p>	<p>Members of the APG identified the preferred engagement mechanism should be through APG rather than meeting between HSCB/PHA, Muscular Dystrophy Campaign and Action Duchenne. The Board/ PHA will continue to engage with people living with neuromuscular conditions, health and social care professionals and other interest groups.</p> <p>Belfast Trust is planning a stakeholder event in September 2016 to ensure that the development of the specialist neuromuscular services takes into account the views of people affected by muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions, health professionals and commissioners.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>

Recommendation	Current position	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 5: Health and Social Care Board initiate steps to ensure that a network approach for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions is formally developed for adult services, following the announcement of increased coordination of paediatric services.</p>	<p>The HSC Board has allocated funding to Belfast Trust for the appointment of an adult neuromuscular consultant and adult neuromuscular nurse specialist. This will be linked to the existing paediatric neurology service and will support the seamless transition of children and young people from paediatric to adult services.</p> <p>Belfast Trust has been asked to bring forward detailed proposals for a viable, fully functional specialist neuromuscular service (adult and paediatric) that integrates primary, community, secondary care.</p> <p>Consultant Post</p> <p>The Trust is aiming to advertise the post on 19/7/2016 with a closing date of 16/8/2016. Interview date. It is likely it will be end of October / November 2016 before interviews take place.</p> <p>Nursing Post (Adult Services)</p> <p>Job description and specification is agreed and the post will be advertised on 19 July 2016.</p>	Partially achieved
<p>Recommendation 6: Health and Social Care Board and Health and Social Care Trusts use the specialist expertise within Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to develop further a 'hub and spoke' model of service provision, with Belfast Trust at the centre of the set-up at which core specialists are located.</p>	<p>Services for people with Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy are provided by HSC Trusts on the basis of assessed need and may involve hospital and/or community based services.</p> <p>There is a generic, regional neuromuscular clinic for all age groups provided by the Belfast Trust which is led by an adult neurologist and a paediatric neurologist with an interest in neuromuscular conditions.</p> <p>HSC Board has resourced an expansion in capacity for adult/young adult care and enhancement of the transition service.</p> <p>Going forward the vision is to establish Belfast as a robust central hub which will in due course support an NI axis linked to local services as well as to tertiary/quaternary services in GB.</p> <p>Where a clinical need has been identified for treatment which cannot be provided in North of Ireland, appropriate patients may receive treatment outside North of Ireland, subject to the HSC Board's approval via the EFR process.</p>	Partially achieved
<p>Recommendation 7: Health and Social Care Trusts appoint transition workers to facilitate patients' transition from paediatric to adult services.</p>	<p>The HSC Board has allocated funding to Belfast Trust for the appointment of an adult neuromuscular consultant and adult neuromuscular nurse specialist. This will be linked to the existing paediatric neurology service and will support the seamless transition of patients from paediatric to adult services.</p> <p>Details of progress on this are set out under previous recommendations.</p>	Partially achieved

Recommendation	Current position	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 8: Health and Social Care Board and Social Care Trusts develop a more streamlined and efficient genetic testing system to reduce delays.</p>	<p>North of Ireland gains access to specialist genetic testing for muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular disorders via the UK Genetic Testing Network (UKGTN). This network provides advice throughout the UK on genetic testing and aims to ensure the provision of high quality equitable genetic testing services.</p> <p>HSC Board has recently secured significant recurrent funding to ensure equity of access for patients from North of Ireland to all approved UKGTN Tests in 16/17. UKGTN offers panel testing allowing for a number of genetic tests to be carried out at the same time which improves the potential for diagnosis and replaces the single gene testing arrangements.</p>	<p>Achieved</p>
<p>Recommendation 9: Health and Social Care Trusts address the need to increase clinical time dedicated to specialist neuromuscular care</p>	<p>The HSC Board has allocated funding to Belfast Trust for the appointment of an adult neuromuscular consultant and adult neuromuscular nurse specialist. This will be linked to the existing paediatric neurology service and will support the seamless transition of patients from paediatric to adult services.</p> <p>Details of progress on this are set out under previous recommendations.</p>	<p>Partially achieved</p>
<p>Recommendation 10: The Health and Social Care Board develops a neuromuscular registry for both the paediatric and the adult services in North of Ireland to ensure the most efficient delivery of specialist care.</p>	<p>The HSCB is supportive of the development of a neuromuscular registry for both paediatric and adult services. This will be taken forward by the care advisors working in partnership with voluntary organisations.</p>	<p>To be progressed</p>
<p>Recommendation 11: The Duchenne Standards of Care guidelines are made widely available to those commissioning, planning and delivering services so that high quality standards of care are achieved in a multidisciplinary approach for all muscular conditions. As new guidelines emerge for other neuromuscular conditions, these should also be made widely available so that commissioning, planning and delivery of these services can be improved.</p>	<p>The Duchenne Standards of Care Guidelines do not have any formal status in North of Ireland but rather they might be regarded as good practice.</p> <p>Consensus statements on standards of care are also available for Congenital Muscular Dystrophies and Spinal Muscular Atrophy.</p> <p>Patient journey for DMD will depend on outcome of GAIN project which is being taken forward by Northern Trust.</p>	<p>Currently used as good practice guidelines</p>

Recommendation	Current position	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 12: The North of Ireland Executive addresses the inequalities of wheelchair service provision so that there is consistency and that people with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions are not forced to resort to private purchases of suitable wheelchairs.</p>	<p>The HSCB commenced a review of the regional eligibility criteria for the provision of wheelchairs through the North of Ireland Wheelchair Service in 2014.</p> <p>This Review has been commissioned by the Director of Social Care and Children's, HSCB on behalf of DHSSPS to consider the eligibility criteria for the provision of wheelchairs.</p> <p>The Terms of Reference for the project are:</p> <p>To review current eligibility criteria in collaboration with key stakeholders to take into account other 'best' practice models of provision both nationally and internationally; and,</p> <p>Analyse current eligibility criteria and consider opportunities for further standardisation, improved efficiency/effectiveness and quality improvement.</p> <p>The HSCB approved the revisions to the original eligibility criteria which have been ratified by DHSSPS. A process is underway to feed back to the stakeholder groups and the revised criteria will be published on the HSCB website.</p> <p>The HSCB, in collaboration with Trusts, has identified a number of processes where improved efficiencies could make a significant impact on waiting times.</p> <p>The BHSCT are currently reviewing and evaluating the improvement plan that was put into place in 2014 and intend to produce an options paper in the near future.</p>	Partially achieved
<p>Recommendation 13: The North of Ireland Executive, in conjunction with HSC, improves the level of recognition and knowledge of muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions at GP level.</p>	<p>A training event for health and social care professional, including GPs, was held on 25 February 2015 to raise awareness of living with neuromuscular conditions.</p>	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 14: The Health and Social Care Board implements a structured long term succession planning system so that key neuromuscular posts are recruited for and appointed quickly to prevent a detrimental gap in services for people with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular condition.</p>	<p>Every effort is made to ensure effective succession planning for doctors across a range of specialties. Generally, where possible, medical posts where the post holder is approaching retirement age are highlighted and identified to the North of Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency in order for them to allocate a junior doctor to a specialist training programme. Similarly, where it is apparent that a specialist nurse/AHP is approaching retirement, steps can be taken to begin to train staff with generic skills.</p> <p>However, as specialist medical training can take up to 5 years and retirement age is not fixed, it can prove challenging to coordinate the completion of training with the retirement of a senior consultant in specialties where the number of consultants is small. Both the HSC Board and Trusts are aware of these challenges and aim to address via advance planning where possible.</p>	Achieved
<p>Recommendation 15: Health Trusts and North of Ireland Councils develop structured joint planning provision so that there is a seamless transition and coordination between health and social care services.</p>	<p>This recommendation is not relevant here. An integrated health and social care system already exists here.</p>	Not applicable

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health further to the comments of Dr. Michael McBride, Chief Executive of the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust at the Committee for Health's meeting of Thursday, 16 June 2016, whether the fourteen day target for urgent breast cancer referrals is under review.

(AQW 2123/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's performance targets for urgent breast cancer referrals are not under review. My focus is on ensuring that the Health and Social Care Board works with the HSC Trusts to achieve the current targets.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Health for an update on proposals for day care services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2153/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: No decision has yet been made on the Western Health and Social Care Trust's proposals for the reform of its day care services for older people.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) why patients have been waiting in excess of four weeks for results of blood tests being analysed at the Royal Victoria Hospital; and (ii) what action is being taken to address the current backlog.

(AQW 2212/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Belfast Trust has documented target turnaround times for blood tests; these vary according to the type of test requested. The Trust has confirmed that there is no particular backlog at present. If an individual patient is concerned about their waiting time the Trust can investigate the specific details of their tests.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health whether the backlog in the analysis of blood tests at the Royal Victoria Hospital could (i) affect the accuracy of the results of the analysis; or (ii) necessitate repeat blood tests being required due to the potential for samples to degrade.

(AQW 2213/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Belfast Trust has documented target turnaround times for blood tests; these vary according to the type of test requested. The Trust has confirmed that there is no particular backlog at present. If an individual patient is concerned about their waiting time the Trust can investigate the specific details of their tests.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) all services provided at the South West Acute Hospital and; (ii) all services initially planned to be provided.

(AQW 2254/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The services provided at the South West Acute Hospital are listed below.

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Allied Health Professions | ■ Maternity Unit |
| ■ Ambulatory Services | ■ Medical and Surgical Assessment Unit |
| ■ Care of Older Person Wards | ■ Mental Health Liaison |
| ■ Children's Centre | ■ Neonatal |
| ■ Children's Wards and Outpatient Service | ■ Older Persons' Assessment and Liaison Service |
| ■ Clinical Investigations | ■ Out Patients |
| ■ Critical Care Unit (ICU / HDU / CCU) | ■ Pharmacy |
| ■ Day Surgery | ■ Social Services |
| ■ Education Suite | ■ Stroke Unit |
| ■ Emergency Department (A&E) | ■ Support Services |
| ■ Inpatient Care | ■ Surgical Wards and Theatres |
| ■ GP Out of Hours | ■ Women's Health Unit |
| ■ Laboratory | ■ X-Ray (Medical Imaging) |

The above list of services reflects the planned services. There were no changes to planned services in the South West Acute Hospital prior to its opening.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 1227/16-21, how much funding has been awarded to organisations providing support for gambling addiction, in each of the last five calendar years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2268/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Due to the nature of how addiction services are delivered it is not possible to identify how much funding is specifically for support for gambling addiction.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure, given that the European Commission has initiated formal legal proceedings against the UK Member State for Northern Ireland's failure to protect its European sites, whether he will serve notices on the unauthorised sand extraction taking place within Lough Neagh Special Protection Area.

(AQW 392/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): Formal legal proceedings in the matter of unauthorised sand extraction within Lough Neagh Special Protection Area have not been initiated by the European Commission.

At this time, given the Court is considering the judicial review, it is not appropriate for me to comment further. Once the judgment from the Court is received it will be fully and carefully considered.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the York Street Interchange Project; and whether works are likely to commence in 2017.

(AQW 1086/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Inspectors Report on the Public Inquiry into the York Street Interchange Scheme was received by TransportNI in January 2016. This is currently being carefully considered.

When we have taken stock of the effect that the EU referendum decision is likely to have on funding for major Departmental projects, I intend to make an announcement on the status of the scheme and release the Inspectors' report, in due course.

Dr Farry asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on plans to re-engineer the junctions at the Craigtlet crossroad.

(AQW 1113/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am aware there has been a lot of debate surrounding the most appropriate layout for a scheme to improve safety and traffic progression at these junctions.

Following a public consultation, officials from TransportNI initiated a pre-application enquiry with planners in Ards and North Down Borough Council. While this has been a lengthy process, it was necessary to inform the decision on the most appropriate scheme for the area.

I am currently considering the outcome of the pre-application enquiry and expect to make an announcement on the preferred layout in due course.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why Bow Street, Donaghadee is being resurfaced while William Street, Donaghadee is not, despite being in a worse state of repair.

(AQW 1373/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that no resurfacing is planned for Bow Street, Donaghadee as it was resurfaced in late 2014.

TransportNI officials are aware of the condition of William Street and I understand that the local Section Office has advised you on previous occasions that this involves a full reconstruction of the street, carriageway and footways, which increases the cost significantly. Funding for such a scheme is not currently available however should that position change then a scheme could be assessed against other competing priorities.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are any plans to resurface portions of the footpath in Towerview Avenue, Bangor.

(AQW 1469/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no current plans to carry out resurfacing on any sections of footway in Towerview Avenue, Bangor.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all (i) completed; (ii) in progress; and (iii) future capital projects funded through his Department in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1660/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The capital programmes funded and completed by the former Department for Regional Development during 2006 - 2011 are detailed below. In the case of TransportNI, the information you have requested is not readily available in this format but can be found in a number of published annual reports as detailed below. For the remainder of the answer I would refer the Member to my answer AQW 817/16-21.

Completed Capital Projects

2006/07

- Dungannon Park & Ride

No records held for Northern Ireland Water for 2006/07

2007/08

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Enniskillen station boundary wall and bus wash | ■ Castlecaulfield WwTW |
| ■ Storage tanks at Enniskillen | ■ Gorestown Road Sewerage Scheme |
| ■ Fivemiletown bus park improvements | ■ Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains |
| ■ Moygashel Waste Water Treatment Works (WwTW) | ■ Benburb/Milltown - RBC Installations West & South |
| ■ Dungannon to Ballygawley (A4) Dualling Watermain Diversions | ■ Derrylin WwTW |
| | ■ Enniskillen WwTW |

2008/09

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Replacement bus shelter at Enniskillen | ■ Castor Bay/ Shanmoy Zone |
| ■ Replacement power washer at Dungannon | ■ Moygashel WwTW |
| ■ Carland Service Reservoir | ■ Derrylin WwTW |
| ■ Gorestown Road Sewerage Scheme | ■ Castlecaulfield WwTW |
| ■ Dungannon to Ballygawley (A4) Dualling Watermain Diversions | ■ Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains |
| | ■ Enniskillen WwTW |

2009/10

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ Replacement power wash at Dungannon | ■ Castlecaulfield WwTW |
| ■ Derrylin WwTW | ■ Benburb/Milltown - RBC Installations West & South |
| ■ Bush WwTWs | ■ Moygashel WwTW |
| ■ Carland Service Reservoir | ■ Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains |
| ■ Castor Bay/ Shanmoy Zone | ■ U5307 and U5307A – Granshagh Drain and Granshagh Branch Drain, Arney, Co. Fermanagh. |
| ■ Enniskillen WwTW | ■ U5708 and U5708A – Tattymacall Drain and Tattymacall Branch Drain, Lisbellaw, Co.Fermanagh |
| ■ Dungannon to Ballygawley (A4) Dualling Watermain Diversions | |

2010/11

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Dungannon entrance and exit yard refurbishment | ■ Bush WwTWs |
| ■ Replace air compressor for Dungannon & Armagh | ■ Derrylin WwTW |
| ■ Enniskillen bus station secure boundary | ■ Castlecaulfield WwTW |
| ■ Skea, Arney Renew Storm Pipe | ■ Moygashel WwTW |
| ■ Castor Bay/ Shanmoy Zone | ■ Benburb/Milltown - RBC Installations West & South |
| ■ Dungannon to Ballygawley (A4) Dualling Watermain Diversions | ■ Enniskillen WwTW |
| ■ Killyhelvin WTW Flood Prevention | ■ Carland Service Reservoir |
| | ■ Castor Bay to Dungannon Strategic Trunk Mains |

TransportNI operates to Council boundaries rather than Assembly Constituency boundaries and therefore works in Fermanagh and South Tyrone area are included, up to 2011, within Fermanagh District Council and Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council reports. These reports are not available on the DfI internet site. However I have arranged for these documents to be placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what new footpath resurfacing plans there are for the Bangor area in 2016/17.

(AQW 1669/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI plans to carry out footway resurfacing schemes at the following locations in the Bangor area in 2016/17.

- Morston Park
- Railwayview Street

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what new footpath resurfacing plans there are for the Holywood area in 2016/17.

(AQW 1670/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no current plans to carry out footway resurfacing schemes in the Holywood area in 2016/17.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what new footpath resurfacing plans there are for the Conlig area in 2016/17.

(AQW 1671/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no current plans to carry out footway resurfacing schemes in the Conlig area in 2016/17.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what new footpath resurfacing plans there are for the Donaghadee area in 2016/17.

(AQW 1672/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI is planning to carry out footway resurfacing schemes at the following locations in the Donaghadee area in 2016/17:

- Bailie Road
- Bailie Terrace
- Bailie Park
- Bailie Gardens

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what new footpath resurfacing plans there are for the Millisle area in 2016/17.

(AQW 1673/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no current plans to carry out footway resurfacing schemes in the Millisle area in 2016/17.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the impact of the vote to leave the European Union will have on his Department; (ii) whether funding made available from the Irish Government for the A5 will be affected; and (iii) if this funding is affected, will the Northern Ireland Executive or the Department for Infrastructure make up the funding shortfall to enable the proper completion of the A5.

(AQW 1713/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: While the precise impact of the vote cannot, as yet, be assessed conclusively, it is clear that the loss of opportunities for the North to co-finance a number of strategic infrastructure projects in the future using EU monies will have a detrimental effect overall and will necessitate a continuous review of strategic plans.

The progression of the A5 project has not been predicated on the necessity of securing EU funds, and the delivery of the project remains a priority for this Department. The funding commitment from the Irish Government to support the project, as expressed in the Fresh Start Agreement, remains in place and I will continue to work closely with Ministerial colleagues to identify opportunities and solutions to deliver our key projects.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new footpath resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Groomsport and their location.

(AQW 1735/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned footway resurfacing schemes for Groomsport in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new footpath resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Crawfordsburn and their location.

(AQW 1736/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned footway resurfacing schemes for Crawfordsburn in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new footpath resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Helen's Bay and their location.

(AQW 1737/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned footway resurfacing schemes for Helen's Bay in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail the projects (a) in progress; and (b) scheduled for the future in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by his Department, that have received EU funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) for his assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Executive Office.

(AQW 1744/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Typically, the securing of EU funds through competitive programmes such as the Trans European Transport Network and the Connecting Europe Facility for major infrastructure projects has been expressed and measured in terms of regional benefits and impacts. With particular reference to competitively-funded projects in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, there were no projects in the area scheduled to receive EU support. In this context, therefore, there is no risk.

In contrast to the competitive funds situation, it appears that the ongoing provision of funding for those co-operation programmes such as INTERREG and PEACE which are financed through structural funds is a somewhat more stable environment; the current indications from the Managing Authority is the pursuit of 'business as usual' approach with the objective of maximising future programme outputs.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure when his Department will introduce the additional exemption to regulation 10(2) of the Taxis (Taximeters, Devices and Maximum Fares) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 in order to resolve the issue of dead miles.

(AQO 135/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am very aware of the issues relating to coastal erosion and coastal management not just in the Strangford constituency but across the whole coastline of the North. There is clearly a need to tackle these issues in a more strategic way than has been the case up to now and I will be playing my part to help to achieve that.

I would like to commend the work of the Ards Peninsula Coastal Erosion Group in the member's constituency in raising the profile of these important issues. I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has recently carried out a survey of the Ards Peninsula coastline to assess the impact of coastal erosion on sea walls and verges adjacent to the carriageway.

While the results of this survey have not yet been finalised it is anticipated that they will provide a clearer picture on the extent of investment required to carry out pro-active repairs in order to prevent incidents such as road collapses in the future. The survey will help to inform the necessary financial planning and prioritisation of required works.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) all groups including volunteer, community, sporting or otherwise that received funding from his Department; and (ii) the amount allocated, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 1787/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In response to your question I can advise the following (this answer covers the position for the transferring functions in former NICS Departments prior to the creation of the Department for Infrastructure):-

Name of Group	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £
Cookstown, Dungannon & Magherafelt (CDM) Community Transport		7,500	7,300
Consumer Council	62,000	62,000	
Sustrans procured services	83,000	227,000	237,000
BEAM Creative Network	14,000	15,000	19,000
Road Safety Council of NI	2,000		4,000
Greater Shantallow Community Arts	8,000	12,000	8,000
Shopmobility Belfast	12,000		
Tiny Life	9,000		
Bann Valley Community Group	6,000		
Ulster Council GAA	15,000	15,000	6,000
Millisle Youth Forum	8,000		
Easilink Community Transport	10,000		
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme	15,000		
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	9,000	6,000	10,000
Cam Wheelers Cycling Club	6,000		
Down Armagh Rural Transport	12,000		

Name of Group	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £
Féile an Phobail		15,000	
U3A Foyle		10,000	
NI Cruise		6,000	
Erne East Community Partnership		7,000	
Community Transport Association UK			15,000
Big Telly Theatre Company			10,000
Birches Action Rural Network			3,000
South Tyrone Ulster Farmers Union			5,000
Parents Education as Autism Therapists			7,000
Larne YMCA			2,000
Norman Whiteside Sports Facility			1,000
St. Brigid's After School Club			3,000
Causeway Rural & Urban Network			2,000
Community Places	136,000	145,000	175,000
Disability Action	45,000	30,000	20,000
Co-Operation Ireland	52,000	26,000	
Place	29,000		
Richhill Building Limited	16,000	32,000	
Portaferry Regeneration Limited	6,000	17,000	
Walled City Partnership	16,000	49,000	
Ballymoney Regeneration Company		33,000	
Disability Action – Mobility Centre	82,000	86,000	
Disability Action – Group Transport	186,000	168,000	
Volunteer Now	81,788	82,000	
Disability Action Transport Scheme	3,000	3,000	3,000
Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee	68,000	68,000	58,000
Shopmobility Ballymena	25,000	25,000	27,000
Shopmobility Belfast	135,000	121,000	106,000
Shopmobility Carrickfergus	7,000	9,000	15,000
Shopmobility Cookstown	30,000	30,000	30,000
Shopmobility Dungannon	21,000	27,000	27,000
Shopmobility Enniskillen	30,000	30,000	30,000
Shopmobility Foyle	30,000	30,000	30,000
Shopmobility Lisburn	11,000	12,000	13,000
Shopmobility Magherafelt	20,000	21,000	23,000
Shopmobility Newry	30,000	30,000	30,000
Shopmobility Omagh		10,000	19,000
Shopmobility Northern Ireland	24,000	32,000	26,000
Cookstown; Dungannon; Magherafelt	554,000	592,000	493,000
Down Community Transport	440,000	428,000	379,000

Name of Group	2013/14 £	2014/15 £	2015/16 £
Easilink	535,000	522,000	397,000
Fermanagh Community Transport	490,000	575,000	426,000
Lagan Valley Rural Transport	209,000	196,000	149,000
North Coast Community Transport	605,000	661,000	500,000
South Antrim Community Transport	213,000	214,000	156,000
Southern Area Partnership	392,000	441,000	354,630
Community Transport Association	110,000	100,000	60,000
ARTS Scheme Supplement			110,000

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the amount of funding that his Department has facilitated in Newry and Armagh from European Funding Streams in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1797/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: It is a premise of EU funding that the beneficial impacts of receiving the same are evidenced in regional, national and EU added value terms.

The former Department for Regional Development sourced £77m of EU funding during the last five years using several programmes to co-finance a range of projects that have delivered significant benefits to the North. Many of these projects such as the bus replacement and the Enterprise overhaul programme have helped serve the needs of our urban and rural populations by improving mobility and accessibility to and from services and centres of learning and employment.

While it is not possible to provide details of disaggregated funding at a constituency level, the details of these projects are attached at Annex A for your information.

Annex A

	Sum of EU Awarded £					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
DETI European Sustainable Competitiveness Programme		5,800,000.00	10,735,500.00	7,185,000.00		23,720,500.00
A2 Upgrade – Belfast Shore Road to Greenisland			5,485,500.00			5,485,500.00
A2 Upgrade – Belfast Shore Road to Greenisland Extension				3,450,000.00		3,450,000.00
Extended Bus Replacement Project			5,250,000.00			5,250,000.00
Optares and Goldlines				3,735,000.00		3,735,000.00
Replacement of Goldline & Metro Fleet		5,800,000.00				5,800,000.00
INTEREG IVA		2,400,000.00	10,278,822.00			12,678,822.00
Drogheda Viaduct			3,168,072.00			3,168,072.00
Enterprise Phase 3 – Overhaul Programme – Stage 2			7,110,750.00			7,110,750.00
Redevelopment of Portadown Railway Station		2,400,000.00				2,400,000.00
INTEREG IVB (AA)	284,000.00					284,000.00

	Sum of EU Awarded £					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
BATTERIE Project	284,000.00					284,000.00
TENT-T	2,440,505.83	15,724,594.80		2,860,472.67	18,917,874.86	39,943,448.16
Belfast Inter-modal Transport hub				2,860,472.67		2,860,472.67
Bottleneck Alleviation and Cross Border Connectivity Works Knockmore to Lurgan					7,576,200.15	7,576,200.15
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Relay Phase 1	1,309,005.95					1,309,005.95
Dualling of the A8 Coleman's Corner to Ballyrickard Roundabout		15,724,594.80				15,724,594.80
Installation of rapid charge points for electrical vehicles and a supporting IT system	110,232.08					110,232.08
Technical Equipment and Infrastructure Upgrade: Londonderry to Coleraine Rail Line					11,341,674.70	11,341,674.70
York Street Interchange – Improvement to Belfast Port Hinterland Connections (Scheme Development Studies)	1,021,267.80					1,021,267.80
Grand Total	2,724,505.83	23,924,594.80	21,014,322.00	10,045,472.67	18,917,874.86	76,626,770.16

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Conlig and their location.

(AQW 1799/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned road resurfacing schemes for Conlig in 2016/17. As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Donaghadee and their location.

(AQW 1800/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has already carried out resurfacing works this year on Shore Street and The Parade, Donaghadee in conjunction with the Council's Public Realm footway scheme. Further resurfacing work on the back of the Public Realm scheme is to be carried out on High Street, Warren Road, Hunters Lane and Townhall Lane. Other schemes are planned for Dam Road, Bailie Road, Bailie Terrace, Bailie Gardens and Bailie Park.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Millisle and their location.

(AQW 1801/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has already completed a resurfacing scheme on Abbey Road in 2016/17. No further schemes are planned for this financial year.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Bangor and their location.

(AQW 1802/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has plans to carry out road resurfacing at Rathgael Road Roundabout in Bangor during 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for the next three financial years for Hollywood and their location.

(AQW 1803/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI plans to carry out a resurfacing scheme on High Street, Hollywood during 2016/17. However, as funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Infrastructure what actions her Department has taken to ensure there is no repeat of the winter flooding experienced by businesses at Lough Neagh.

(AQW 1807/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Prolonged and heavy rainfall, throughout much of November, December 2015 and January of this year resulted in saturated ground conditions and generally higher than normal water levels in lakes and watercourses. Rainfall totals have been well above average with this being the wettest winter in over 100 years.

My Department is undertaking a review of the recent flooding event. This review considers the causes of the flooding, the multi-agency response to the flooding, and the management and operating regime to control water levels in Lough Neagh. However, in the meantime, Rivers Agency will continue to monitor and regulate the levels of Lough Neagh within the prescribed limits as far as weather permits.

In addition the 'Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme' is an innovative approach to managing flood risk, developed by Rivers Agency, on behalf of the Inter-Departmental EU Floods Directive Steering Group. This scheme provides assistance to property owners who wish to install individual property protection to help reduce the impact of flooding.

In January 2016, the then Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Minister when introducing the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme, made a commitment to take forward extension of that scheme to non-domestic properties. Therefore, the Department of Infrastructure is currently taking forward that committed action and is developing a necessary business case for this proposal.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the development of the A5.

(AQO 143/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On 16 February 2016 the then Department for Regional Development (DRD) published for consultation the Notice of Intention to Make Vesting Orders (draft Vesting Orders) for a number of phases of the scheme:

- Phase 1A - New Buildings to north of Strabane;
- Phase 1B - south of Omagh to Ballygawley; and
- Phase 2 - north of Strabane to south of Omagh.

The Notice of Intention to Make a Direction Order (i.e. draft Direction Order) for the length between New Buildings and Ballygawley and a new Environmental Statement (ES) covering the full extent of the scheme between New Buildings and Aughnacloy were also published at that time. During the ensuing consultation periods, which extended to 2 June 2016, almost 1000 representations were received on the proposals.

A Public Inquiry has been programmed for autumn 2016, to be administered by the Planning Appeals Commission, and the Inspectors Report is then expected around May 2017. My Department will then consider the recommendations of this Report in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary statutory Orders (Direction Order, Vesting Order and Stopping-Up Order).

Subject to satisfactory completion of the statutory processes, I am hopeful that construction can commence in late 2017 on Phase 1A (between New Buildings and north of Strabane) in line with the 'A Fresh Start' Agreement.

I am currently reviewing funding scenarios with officials to explore how additional phases of the A5 Scheme can be delivered.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of train services to and from Newry.

(AQO 144/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: NI Railways currently operates 24 services per day Monday to Friday between Belfast / Portadown and Newry, 18 of which are Enterprise services which travel between Belfast and Dublin. In addition Irish Rail operates one early morning train to Dublin.

During July and August NI Railways will also be running an additional 'DayTripper' train between Belfast and Dublin departing Belfast at 09:35 hours and returning at 18:00 hours which will serve Newry Station.

On Saturdays Newry Station is serviced by 18 trains, on the Belfast – Dublin corridor, whilst on Sundays this number is reduced to 10 services (5 in each direction).

I am aware that Translink staff met with interested groups at Newry earlier this year and implemented a series of measures to try to stimulate demand and will continue to promote the service. Currently weekday train services operating between Newry, Poyntzpass, Scarva, Portadown and onto Belfast adequately meets demand perhaps reflecting the heavy usage of bus services on the route.

I am hopeful that in the future an hourly Enterprise service can be provided between Belfast and Dublin and this will stop at Newry.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the implementation of his Department's Bicycle Strategy. (AQO 146/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Bicycle Strategy, published in August 2015, provides a broad framework for a community where people have the freedom and confidence to travel by bicycle for everyday journeys. I want to continue to support that framework through building a comprehensive network for the bicycle, supporting people who choose to travel by bicycle and promoting the bicycle as a viable mode of transport.

The details for delivering the Strategy will be set out in a series of five year Delivery Plans. The first delivery plan, due to be published this autumn, will set out how I plan to deliver the strategy over the first five years of the strategy. The Delivery Plan will focus on the main tasks or projects required to make early progress in delivering more journeys by bicycle.

Even before the publication of the first Delivery Plan, my Department has been developing a number of flagship bicycle infrastructure schemes in Belfast. It has also taken forward a range of projects including the Belfast Bicycle Network Plan, the Strategic Plan for Greenways and the 'small grants programme' for Councils which will provide small grants towards the development of feasibility studies and more detailed proposals for greenways.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many applications have been made, granted and refused to the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme. (AQO 147/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Since the launch of the Home Owner Flood Protection Grant Scheme in January 2016, 87 applications have been received by Rivers Agency and 54 of these applications have been approved.

Our consultant is currently carrying out 'water entry surveys' and preparing recommendation reports. No reports are completed to date.

Rivers Agency has refused 28 applications, as the applicant did not meet the eligibility criteria or else provided insufficient evidence to support their application.

Five applications are still under consideration.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what work will be undertaken in preparation for any extra powers which will come to his Department as a consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. (AQW 1880/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: It is too early to be definitive about what additional powers are likely to be secured. No decision has been made on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union.

Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected and advanced and that new opportunities are developed as part of any new arrangements.

At the request of the Executive, the Head of the Civil Service has established individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department's functions, legislation and regulations as well as identifying future challenges and opportunities. The Executive also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to the Executive.

These teams will liaise with the British and Irish Governments and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal for this region.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure which roads in North Down will benefit from the £10m additional investment in the rural network. (AQW 1885/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I must advise the Member that since I have only recently made this additional funding for rural road repairs available, my Department's TransportNI staff are currently drawing up a list of potential schemes and these will have to be looked at in the context of the allocation.

I should point out to the Member that there is no specific allocation of funding to North Down and that particular allocation is for rural roads in the North down and Ards area.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for Crawfordsburn in each of the next three financial years.

(AQW 1887/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned road resurfacing schemes for Crawfordsburn in 2016/17. However in the general area around Crawfordsburn there is a proposed scheme on Ballyrobert Road involving sidelifilling of the verge and a short length of resurfacing.

As funding levels of 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for Helen's Bay in each of the next three financial years.

(AQW 1890/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned road resurfacing schemes for Helen's Bay in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for Groomsport in each of the next three financial years.

(AQW 1893/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned road resurfacing schemes for Groomsport in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Infrastructure following his announcement of the rural roads initiative, to detail how much of the £10 million will be spent in the Lagan Valley constituency.

(AQW 1963/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise you that £500k was allocated for rural road schemes in Eastern Division. Of this £410k was allocated to Lisburn & Castlereagh Section Office which is largely responsible for roads in the Lagan Valley constituency.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from his Department, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1970/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In each of the last five years, the then Department for Regional Development paid funding to the following Rural Community Transport Partnerships and Shopmobility Scheme in the Newry and Armagh area:

- Armagh Rural Transport (ART)
- Down Armagh Rural Transport (DART)
- Newry & Mourne Community Transport (NMCT)
- Shopmobility Newry.

Up to 2015, a Voucher Scheme limited to £100 per trip, was in operation. In some of the years of operation over 140 different organisations benefited from this scheme. However, it is not possible to distinguish the groups benefiting specifically to the Newry and Armagh area.

With effect from 1 April 2014, Disability Action has been paid a grant to provide the Disability Action Transport Scheme (DATS) which then made arrangements with the Rural Community Transport Providers listed above to provide services.

Ulster Council GAA located in the Newry and Armagh constituency area received funding through the former Department of Environment's Road Safety Grant Scheme in each of the last five years:

The Richhill Building Preservation Trust also received funding in 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 from the former Department of Environment's Townscape Heritage Initiative.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on any future plans for the road network around the Maze site.
(AQW 2008/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are three possible future schemes for the road network around the Maze Long Kesh (MLK) site.

These are;

- Knockmore Link Road
- M1/A1 Sprucefield Bypass scheme;
- Direct link from MLK site to the M1 Motorway.

The current status of the three road schemes are:

Knockmore Link Road

In the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015, the Knockmore to Sprucefield link road, known as the M1- Knockmore Link, has been identified as a developer-led proposal. This means that it is the responsibility of the developers of adjacent land to deliver this road scheme as part of their development.

I understand that Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council is currently considering how this scheme could help unlock development potential in the West Lisburn area. The Council is aware that the limited capital funding available to my Department is directed towards the maintenance and improvement of the Strategic Road Network and that it is highly unlikely that any financial contribution towards this scheme could be justified at this time. Currently when compared against demand for other major road schemes it would not be a high priority.

M1/A1 Sprucefield Bypass Scheme

My Department has a long term scheme proposal to connect the A1 to the M1 motorway, by-passing Sprucefield. This scheme has been developed to a preliminary stage, where two potential corridors have been identified, one on either side of Sprucefield. One of these, known as the Culcavy East Corridor, would pass between Culcavy and Sprucefield, and cross the motorway to connect at Junction 8. This could be close to, but not connected, to any potential future access to the MLK site. When the next stage of this scheme development is carried out it will consider both corridors in more detail to determine a preferred route option. At present this could be either side of Sprucefield. The Executive has identified a number of Flagship Projects where indicative funding has been agreed for future budget periods. Unfortunately the M1/A1 Sprucefield Bypass is not one of these projects and its progression is dependent on the availability of finance through future budgetary settlements.

Direct Link from MLK Site to M1 Motorway

There is currently no Ministerial agreement on the development of the MLK site. However, should future development of the site require improved road access, that will be primarily a matter for the MLK Development Corporation to fund and to deliver. If this development progresses my officials are willing to work with the MLK Development Corporation and provide advice on the design of any road proposals.

Also, my Department is currently examining the feasibility of providing a largely off-road cycleway linking the Blaris Road to the Sprucefield Park and Ride site and on to the Halftown Road, where this facility would link to the MLK site.

The decision to provide this facility will depend on the outcome of the feasibility study and the availability of future funding.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the spending on the maintenance of road markings in the Fermanagh and Omagh Council area for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2017/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain an analysis of its expenditure in the format requested. Expenditure on the maintenance of road markings forms part of my Departments annual programme of Traffic Maintenance activities and I can provide you with that expenditure for the last 5 years.

Traffic Maintenance includes the operation and maintenance of traffic signs and signals, including energy costs for illuminated signs & signals, road markings, reflective road studs, safety fences & pedestrian guard rails.

Council	2011-2012 £k	2012-2013 £k	2013-2014 £k	2014-2015 £k	2015-2016 £k
Fermanagh District Council	222	200	336	332	609
Omagh District Council	269	362	286	276	

Prior to Local Government reform in 2015-2016 Fermanagh District Council and Omagh District Council were separate bodies. In 2015-2016 a new Council, Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, was created, as such for that year I have provided only one figure.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many proposals for office developments are at (i) pre-application; and (ii) planning application stage.

(AQW 2044/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The table below provides information in relation to the number of proposals for office developments at pre-application and planning application stage. It should be noted that the applications also include mixed use applications which have an element of office development, change of use to office accommodation and refurbishment of existing offices.

Pre Applications for Office Developments as at 31/03/2016	Applications for Office Development as at 31/03/2016
13	116

It should also be noted that this information does not form part of published and validated DfI Official Statistics and should be regarded as an estimate.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 929/16-21, to provide Translink's definition of an authorised member of staff.

(AQW 2079/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As per NI Railways bye-laws an authorised person means any officer, employee or agent of the company, and exceptionally could include any Police Constable acting in the execution of his duty.

In the case of bus operations, the authorised member of staff would usually be the bus driver, although an Inspector or Manager may be called upon if the animal is being boarded at a manned bus station.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the total number of people who received the Home Owner Flood Protection Scheme grant in each of the last 12 months, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 2089/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The 'Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme' is an innovative approach to managing flood risk, developed by Rivers Agency, on behalf of the Inter-Departmental EU Floods Directive Steering Group. The scheme was launched on 13 January 2016 and Rivers Agency is administering the scheme for the first 2 years at which point an appraisal of the effectiveness of the Homeowner Flood Protection Grant Scheme will take place and this will inform any decision on the longer term viability of the Scheme.

This scheme provides assistance to property owners who wish to install individual property protection to help reduce the impact of flooding and is available to the owners of residential properties that meet a simple eligibility criteria and the scheme will generally cover 90% of the installation costs with the remaining 10% contributed by the homeowner. The grant will be capped at £10,000.

88 applications have been received so far, 6 are currently under consideration and the following shows a breakdown of the 82 applications that were received by the end of June 2016, by constituency:

1	Belfast East	2 applications, both approved
2	Belfast North	1 application, declined
3	Belfast South	8 applications, 3 approved, 5 declined
4	Belfast West	No applications
5	East Antrim	9 Applications, 7 approved, 2 declined
6	East Londonderry	1 Application, declined.
7	Fermanagh & South Tyrone	3 applications, 1 approved, 2 declined
8	Foyle	2 applications, 1 approved, 1 declined
9	Lagan Valley	3 applications, 1 approved, 2 declined
10.	Mid Ulster	4 Applications, 3 approved, 1 declined
11.	Newry and Armagh	8 Applications, 4 approved, 4 declined
12.	North Antrim	1 Application, approved
13.	North Down	2 Applications, both declined
14.	South Antrim	7 Applications, 6 approved, 1 declined
15.	South Down	9 Applications, 7 approved, 2 declined
16.	Strangford	6 Applications, 4 approved, 2 declined
17.	Upper Bann	6 Applications, 6 approved
18.	West Tyrone	10 Applications, 8 approved, 2 declined.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has plans to establish new bus route services in West Tyrone.

(AQW 2090/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As part of the Service Agreement in place between my Department and Translink, Translink continuously assesses the performance of their services and where there is sustainable demand they will establish new bus routes or modify existing services.

From 1 July 2016, Translink has modified its offering on key commuter services to Belfast from Strabane and Omagh to improve journey times. To complement these improvements and deliver its aim of attracting more passengers, Translink has also introduced promotional fares on these services.

In addition, a twice weekly service from Omagh and Strabane to Portstewart and Portrush has recently been introduced during the summer months of July and August.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure in light of and in preparation for the United Kingdom exiting the European Union, will his Department now commission a programme of work to identify the legislation, imposing EU directives, to be repealed.

(AQW 2097/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: At this early stage we have not yet fully established the detail of the legislative impact or requirements arising from "Brexit".

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many times in each of the past five years officials or ex-officials have been referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the offence of; (i) misfeasance; or (ii) malfeasance in a public office **(AQW 2113/16-21)**

Mr Hazzard: There have been no cases in the last five years where the Department for Infrastructure has referred officials or ex officials to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the offence of; (i) misfeasance; or (ii) malfeasance in a public office.

This answer covers the position for the transferring functions in former NICS Departments prior to the creation of the Department for Infrastructure.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the total number of potholes that have been reported in Upper Bann in each of the last five years; and (ii) the total number of potholes that have been repaired in Upper Bann in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2114/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI does not hold the requested information on a constituency basis, but rather by District Council area.

During the period April 2011 to March 2016 there was a total of 35,860 surface defect reported in the former Banbridge and Craigavon council areas with 31,899 of these subsequently repaired.

The majority of these defects were recorded by officials during routine maintenance inspections, however, the figures provided below also includes those defects reported by the public and considered to meet intervention levels.

	Total number of potholes reported	Total number of potholes repaired
2011	5255	4906
2012	7128	6813
2013	8008	7474
2014	6978	6792
2015	5813	3719
2016	2678	2195
Total	35860	31899

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what roads in Upper Bann will be repaired as a result of the launch of the Rural Roads Initiative.

(AQW 2115/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Rural Roads Initiative will target sections of the rural road network in greatest need of repair across the Banbridge and Craigavon area providing scope to undertake a programme of small scale resurfacing schemes on selected lengths of the rural road network.

My Department's TransportNI does not hold the requested information on a constituency basis, but rather by local Council area. However, I can advise that programmes of work are currently being developed by TransportNI engineers and subject to

the availability of funding, it is planned to carry out the initial phase of small scale resurfacing schemes on selected lengths of the following roads in the Banbridge and Craigavon council area.

- | | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| ■ U1168 off Derryanvill Road | ■ U1069 Church Road (West) | ■ U4367 Dicksons Hill Road |
| ■ U1081 Carrick Road | ■ U1106 Derrycrow Road | ■ U4258 Lairds Road |
| ■ U1350 Island Road | ■ U1017 Annaghdroghal Lane | ■ U4057 Skeagh Road |
| ■ U1098 Derrycush Road | ■ U1129 Turmoyra Lane | ■ U4084 Stramore Road |
| ■ U1089 off Derryvinney Road | ■ U1107 off Ballynerry North Road | ■ U4102 Parkstown Lane |
| ■ U1063 Wood Road | ■ C160 Ardmore Road | ■ C0352 Ballylough Road |
| ■ U1166 off Corbracky Road | ■ B0002 Derrytrasna Road | ■ U4094 Ballykelly Road |
| ■ U4095 Lenaderg Road | ■ B0002 Derrymacash Road | ■ U4462 Kiln Lane |
| ■ U4288 Cavehill Lane | ■ C160 Bannfoot Road | ■ U4069 Skeltons Cut |
| ■ U4103 Knocknagore Road | ■ C310 Diamond Road | ■ U4073 Tullyhenan Road |
| ■ U4135 Tullylish Road | ■ C310 Diamond Road | ■ U4308 Bog Road |
| ■ U4350 Lisnacroppin Road | ■ U4113 Kilmacrew Road | ■ U4309 Annaghbane Road |
| ■ C153 Castor Bay Road (3no stretches) | ■ U4047 Scolban Road | ■ U4297 Rock Meeting Road |
| ■ U1069 Church Road (East) | ■ U4226 Aghaderg Road | ■ U4072 Ballymoney Road |

My Department will also continue to submit bids to future monitoring rounds for additional funding to deliver further resurfacing schemes.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned for Millisle over the next financial year. (AQW 2124/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Millisle area over the next financial year.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned for Groomsport over the next financial year. (AQW 2125/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Groomsport area over the next financial year.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what traffic islands are planned for Crawfordsburn over the next financial year. (AQW 2126/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no plans to provide traffic islands in the Crawfordsburn area over the next financial year.

Details of my Department's annual report to each local council are published online and can be viewed on the DfI website at: <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/type/corporatereports>

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to provide details on the number of flights which landed at Belfast City Airport after the 9:30pm curfew each day since May 2016; and to detail the exceptional circumstances which necessitated the flights to land after the curfew. (AQW 2130/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: 37 flights landed at, and 10 flights departed from, George Best Belfast City Airport after 9.30pm during May 2016. The statistics for June have not yet been received. The reasons for the late flights in May included technical issues, air traffic control restrictions and radar problems, crew shortages, aircraft swaps, slot availability, bad weather and an ill passenger.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A6 redevelopment. (AQW 2148/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am pleased to advise that preparatory works on the A6 Flagship project are ongoing.

The A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme is now well advanced, with officials working, in coordination with the appointed contractor and designers, to develop an agreed cost for the construction phase of the works.

Progression to the construction phase of the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme is predicated on the agreement of the construction costs, successful completion of the statutory processes and Business Case approval. It is anticipated that works will commence on this section in early autumn 2016.

The funding announced in the December 2015 Budget Statement for the A6 was sufficient to construct the Randalstown to Castledawson scheme and part of the Derry to Dungiven scheme.

In May of this year my Department appointed consultants to assist with the procurement and delivery of the A6 Derry to Dungiven dualling scheme. The consultants are currently working with my officials to determine the extent of the Derry to Dungiven scheme, including a bypass of Dungiven, which could be delivered within the funding available.

I am actively engaging with my officials about expediting delivery of the scheme from Dungiven to Drumahoe during this mandate.

Both schemes along the A6 route are of strategic and economic importance within Northern Ireland and provide an essential road link between the Belfast and the North-West.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has plans to take responsibility for coastal erosion. (AQW 2151/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department currently has responsibility for protecting the roads and railway networks and certain sea defenses (which are designed to protect against flooding rather than erosion). This only accounts for some 20% of our coastline. In relation to new development the Department's Strategic Planning Policy Statement provides that development will not be permitted in areas of the coast known to be at risk from flooding, coastal erosion, or land instability and advises that such areas should be identified in Local Development Plans.

This policy is implemented at the local level by councils who have responsibility for planning along much of the coastline. The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs has a specific role as the marine licensing authority and in nature conservation protection. It is also worth pointing out that a large portion of the coastline is in private ownership and thus under the individual landowners responsibility.

There have been suggestions that a single government department could be charged with the responsibility of leading on the strategic policy relating to coastline management including coastal erosion issues. This would be a matter for the Executive to decide upon and to resource.

However, I recognize the need for a more strategic approach to address the issues of coastal management and coastal erosion, and I have welcomed the establishment of the Coastal Management Forum by the former Minister for Regional Development towards the end of the last mandate.

I will be discussing the future of the Forum and the overall approach to coastal management with the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs in the near future.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps his Department is taking, with the Office of Public Works, to manage flooding in Clady, Co. Tyrone. (AQW 2155/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Rivers Agency and OPW staff met in Enniskillen on Wednesday 6 July to discuss a range of issues affecting drainage and flooding in the border areas. Issues relating to Clady/River Finn were discussed and Rivers Agency will now assess the best course of action going forward.

The emergency works undertaken by Rivers Agency to provide temporary protection for Clady Village and carry out reinstatement of floodbank breaches on the Finn and Mourne rivers were endorsed at the recent meeting of the Drainage Council on 23 June 2016. In addition, the lower section of the burn running through the village was successfully designated at the same meeting which will permit Rivers Agency to undertake routine inspection and maintenance of this watercourse.

Rivers Agency is in the final stages of completion of a pre-feasibility study on a proposal to replace the damaged floodwall in Clady with a solution that will afford a satisfactory level of flood protection to the village.

Subject to available resources and competing priorities, it is hoped to undertake this scheme in the 2017 – 2018 financial year.

I hope the progress made to date meets with your satisfaction.

Ms Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the 2.5 kilometres of the A8 dualling scheme which had to be replaced and resurfaced because of defective aggregate was paid for by the contractor or the Department as part of the contract. (AQW 2182/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the results of inspections and testing in 2015, the presence of unsuitable material was identified in a number of areas of the surface layer along the A8 Belfast to Larne dual carriageway. The former Department for Regional Development, in conjunction with the contractor, took immediate action to address the issue and subsequently the contractor replaced the affected surfacing to ensure that the required standards were met. I can confirm that this work was paid for by the contractor and that there was no cost to the former Department for Regional Development.

Ms Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the discussions (i) he has had; and (ii) plans to have, with counterparts in Great Britain with regard to the implications for those travelling between Northern Ireland and Great Britain as a result of the European Union referendum result.

(AQW 2183/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have not had discussions, nor do I currently plan to have, discussions with counterparts in Britain regarding travel between here and Britain, as a result of the recent European Union referendum. Security policy for UK ports and airports is a reserved matter and, as such, lies with the Department for Transport (DfT) in London.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any bids currently being prepared by his Department for European infrastructure funds.

(AQW 2188/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is currently preparing an application for EU funding from the INTERREG V Territorial Co-operation Programme for the development of the North West Multimodal Transport Hub located in the city of Derry.

Further bids are also being prepared under this programme by two of my Department's Arms Length Bodies; Northern Ireland Water and Waterways Ireland. Northern Ireland Water is submitting two applications: the first is the Sustainable Catchment Area Management Plan (SCAMP) project and the second is the Shared Waters Enhancement and Loughs Legacy (SWELL) project. The application being prepared by Waterways Ireland is for the development of the Ulster Canal Greenway.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure from which budget will compensation be paid to FP McCann following its successful litigation over the A8 road tender; and whether this will adversely impact his Department's 2016 to 2021 programme for delivery of infrastructure.

(AQW 2194/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On 21 June 2016 the Northern Ireland High Court ruled that the Department had breached Public Contract Regulations in rejecting a tender for the A8 Belfast to Larne dualling scheme. The Judge has given both parties the opportunity to make further submissions in relation to how damages should be assessed.

My Department is currently awaiting legal advice regarding an appeal of this decision.

Expense incurred in the course of construction, including legal costs will add to the overall capital cost of the scheme. While no final assessment has been made of the damages in this case, they should be considered in the context of the scheme cost, which is in the region of £134 million, and the Departmental capital budget of some £384 million for 2016/17.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department or its officials have received, or been made aware of, complaints over the performance of any of the eleven new local councils with regard to the administration and delivery of their recently inherited planning responsibilities and functions.

(AQW 2195/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am aware that the former Department of the Environment received a small number of correspondence cases during the period 2015-16, the first year since the transfer of the newly reformed planning system, which raised some concerns with the performance of some of the new local councils with regard to the administration and delivery of their recently inherited planning responsibilities and functions.

These cases were assessed on a case by case basis and often the most appropriate course of action was to refer the complainant to the council's established complaints procedures.

While there are clear lines of separation between the roles and functions of local and central government I believe that there is a collective responsibility to ensure that the system operates effectively. Going forward, I believe that we should seek to share good practice identified through performance monitoring and encourage the adoption of efficient and effective approaches across the system in order to drive forward continuous improvement.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to outline the process whereby under-performance and failure by a local council planning authority can be referred for his consideration; (ii) under what circumstances he would consider intervention; and (iii) to outline the extent of his powers of intervention to address evident failure.

(AQW 2196/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The new two-tier planning system has been in place since 1st April 2015. Therefore 2015/16 is the first year in which the new local councils have undertaken their roles as local planning authorities in the reformed system and represents a baseline year against which to monitor future performance.

The performance of councils is something which is actively monitored by my Department. A range of performance indicators has been established which cover the processing of local and major planning applications and enforcement cases.

The Planning Act (NI) 2011 contains appropriate checks and balances for the new planning system including the Department's scrutiny role in the local development plan process and call-in powers to intervene to determine any application which raises strategic issues beyond an individual council area or in which a council has an interest. In addition, the 2011 Act contains reserve powers under which my Department can take action where it is felt that a council has failed to discharge its planning

responsibilities. I would envisage the exercise of these powers in only the most exceptional circumstances which cannot be pre-determined.

While there are clear lines of separation between the roles and functions of local and central government I believe that there is a collective responsibility to ensure that the system operates effectively. Going forward I believe that we should seek to share good practice identified through performance monitoring and encourage the adoption of efficient and effective approaches across the system in order to drive forward continuous improvement.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for his assessment of the impact of the recent Voluntary Exit Scheme within the Northern Ireland Civil Service on the availability of Transport NI staff to attend site meetings with community representatives; and (ii) whether he believes that this will reduce the impact which community groups have in bringing forward issues and concerns.

(AQW 2214/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that as a result of the Voluntary Exit Scheme within the Northern Ireland Civil Service there are fewer staff employed in my Department's TransportNI and as such there are fewer operational staff available to attend site meetings, including meetings with community representatives.

Even though TransportNI staff may not be able to attend as many meetings as previously was the case I do not believe this will reduce the impact of community groups as any issues raised at community group meetings can be brought to the attention of the relevant TransportNI section via correspondence or telephone communications.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what new street lighting schemes are planned for Bangor over the next financial year.

(AQW 2215/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are 2 street lighting renewal schemes planned for Bangor in the 2016/2017 financial year. These are Ashford Park, Bangor and the Albany area, Bangor.

Street lighting works programmes for 2017/2018 will be compiled when the relevant allocations for that period are known.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what new street lighting schemes are planned for Millisle over the next financial year.

(AQW 2216/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are no new street lighting schemes planned for Millisle in the 2016/2017 financial year.

Street lighting works programmes for 2017/2018 will be compiled when the relevant financial allocations for that period are known.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what new street lighting schemes are planned for Donaghadee over the next financial year.

(AQW 2217/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are no new street lighting schemes planned for Donaghadee in the 2016/2017 financial year.

Street lighting works programmes for 2017/2018 will be compiled when the relevant financial allocations for that period are known.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what new street lighting schemes are planned for Hollywood over the next financial year.

(AQW 2218/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are no new street lighting schemes planned for Hollywood in the 2016/2017 financial year.

Street lighting works programmes for 2017/2018 will be compiled when the relevant allocations for that period are known.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether any of the funding received through the June monitoring round will be used to resurface William Street in Donaghadee.

(AQW 2219/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the funding received through the June monitoring round is to be used for a rural roads repair initiative and some additional resource funding for routine maintenance.

Consequently I can confirm that none of this funding is earmarked for resurfacing William Street in Donaghadee.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure why the crash barrier at Sans Souci Park was initially removed.

(AQW 2232/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In order to ensure compliance with current standards, the Department assesses safety barriers across the road network to identify those considered to be sub-standard or life expired. The safety barrier on the Malone Road at Sans Souci Park was assessed as part of this programme.

A condition survey of the existing barrier was completed which identified issues with rotten wooden posts and with the terminal ends. As it was concluded that the barrier could be hazardous to road users in the event of a collision, the decision was made to remove it.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the proportion of the additional £10 million funding that he has recently made available to improve the condition of rural roads that will be spent on rural roads in (a) the Omagh district; and (b) the Strabane district; and to detail (b) the roads in both districts that will be repaired, including the commencement and completion dates for this work.

(AQW 2238/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Western Division has been allocated £4 million of this Rural Road Initiative funding and, this was further distributed across the Division based on the lengths of rural roads with £850k allocated to the Fermanagh and Omagh (East) section office and £875k allocated to the Derry and Strabane section office. A draft schedule of roads which would benefit from this funding has been compiled and an initial list of roads in the Omagh and Strabane areas is attached. Additional roads will be added once further analysis of costs and road condition has been carried out. Work is programmed to start week commencing 25 July and is expected to take up to two months to complete.

Road Number	Road name
U1549/02	Crockavarred Road
U1603/03	Dullaghan Road
U1604/02	Lettergash Road
C681/10	Longhill Road
U1623/01	Bridge Rd
U1538/01	Falsky Road
U1536/01	Burrow Road
U1533/01_02	Botera Road
U1528/01	Strathroy Road
U1525/01	Lisnagirr Road
U1244	Mullydoo Road
C612	Blackbog Road
U1240	Crockanboy Rd
U1267	Backglen Rd
U1267	Craighill Rd
U1202	Tattynagole Rd
C0615	Reghan Rd
U1208	Ballykeel Rd
U1303	Shanley Road
U1655	Tullycunny Rd
U1301	Edergoole Rd (U)
U1322	Ronan Rd
U1321	Gargrim Rd
U1320	Garvallah Rd
U1617	Kildrum Rd
U1301	Edergoole Rd
U1758	Aghnagar Rd
U1729	Kilcam Rd

Road Number	Road name
U1316	Clogherney Rd
U1314	Laragh Rd (Bog Rd)
U1747	Cranmore Rd
U1729	Redergan Rd
U1741	Edenderry Rd
U1741	Leap Lane
U1748	Cranogue Rd
U1312	Rock Rd
U1317	Tullyvally Rd
B0536_08	Ligford Road
C0602_03	Moyagh Road
C0675_10	Kilclean Road
C0677_08	Orchard Road
U0103_14	Freughlough Road
U0105_14	Grove Road
U0146_12	Aghnahoo Road
U0166_01	Mullanabreen Road
U0170_11	Blane Road
U0206_02	Somerville Road
U0208_11	Prospect Road
U0211_06	Peacock Road
U1801_01	Park Road
U1802_01	Greenlaw Road
U1830_01	Windyhill Road
U1845_02	Sallowilly Road
U2005_01	Gortileck Road
U2005_02	Gortileck Road

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of how European Union membership has benefitted his Department, including facilitating the achievement of his Department's objectives.

(AQW 2247/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: From a financial perspective, my Department has had the opportunity to compete for EU Funding through a range of programmes and it has secured almost £100m since 2007 with over half of this figure achieved in the current 2014-2020 programming period. This co-financing has been a major factor in accelerating and delivering a wide range of transport related projects such as the A1/M1 between Belfast and Dublin as well as rail projects including the Coleraine to Derry rail track improvement project and the Enterprise service refurbishment project.

I am determined that my Department will continue to pursue further sources of EU co-financing for as long as possible, and my officials are currently preparing applications for a number of projects, including the multimodal transport hub in Derry.

From a policy perspective, EU membership has provided opportunities to identify and subsequently communicate key messages relating to the particular challenges facing a peripheral and isolated region such as ours and, in doing so, we have developed many mutually beneficial and productive relationships with other EU regions and Member States and I am keen to maintain these as fully as possible in the future.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what financial plans have been put in place to mitigate any loss of income as a result of the British exit from the European Union.

(AQW 2250/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The securing of EU funding through both competitive and non-competitive channels has never been the sole determinant for project delivery; rather, it has been treated as an additionality that has the benefit of allowing other projects to be progressed sooner than may have been originally scheduled. It is clear that in this regard, a withdrawal from the EU is likely to have a detrimental effect.

I am continuing to work closely with my ministerial colleagues in the Executive to determine the full political and financial implications of an EU withdrawal and, in the event of Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty being activated, we are determined to negotiate and secure the best possible outcome for the people of the North. Any such negotiations will, of course, include discussions on how any potential financial shortfall will be addressed.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the road maintenance budget for Newry and Armagh in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2253/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however I can provide the member with information on road maintenance expenditure in TransportNI's Southern Division.

TransportNI's Southern Division includes the Parliamentary Constituencies of Newry & Armagh, North Down, South Down, Strangford and parts of Upper Bann and Lagan Valley. The expenditure detailed in the table below covers all these areas.

Division	2011-2012 £'k	2012-2013 £'k	2013-2014 £'k	2014-2015 £'k	2015-2016 £'k
South	34,728	31,267	37,770	28,992	16,640

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding awarded by his Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2260/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The information requested for the Ardoyne area is not held at that specifically level by my Department, however, information relating to the Council area and Constituency area within which the Ardoyne area falls is available. This information is summarized in the table below.

	Resource £m	Capital £m	Total £m
2013-14			
Transport NI	12.6	13.0	25.6
NI Water		5.3	5.3
2014-15			
Transport NI	10.4	14.0	24.4
NI Water		7.9	7.9
2015-16			
Transport NI	8.0	13.2	21.2
NI Water		1.8	1.8
Total	31.0	55.2	86.2

Transport NI

The TransportNI expenditure is for the Belfast City Council over the last three years. Expenditure on road infrastructure would mainly be cyclical in nature rather than project based. Further detail can be accessed on the Department's website and can be found via the following hyperlinks –

- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/annual-report-belfast-city-council-2016>
- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/annual-and-interim-reports-belfast-city-council-2015>
- <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/annual-and-interim-reports-belfast-city-council-2014>

I can advise that works in the time period requested which specifically benefited the Ardoyne area included –

- (i) Oldpark Road at Oldpark Avenue - zebra crossing changed to puffin crossing
- (ii) Crumlin Road at Ardoyne Library – new puffin crossing

My Department's Transport Projects Division facilitated the introduction of an Audio Visual system on Translink Metro buses – whilst this investment wasn't specifically focussed on Ardoyne, Metro buses serving the Ardoyne area would have had this facility.

The Audio Visual system is designed to be of benefit to people with visual impairments, older people and people unfamiliar with the bus network, including tourists.

NI Water

The information included in the table is for the Belfast North constituency in its entirety. There has been a total of £15m invested in capital in the last three years by NI Water.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) all projects in Newry and Armagh (a) being completed; and (b) scheduled for the future, that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) whether this funding is now at risk following the referendum decision to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether, should this funding be at risk, equivalent funds will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or his Department.

(AQW 2323/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently two projects that would benefit Newry and Armagh for which applications are being prepared for EU co-financing through the INTERREG programme. These are the Inland Waterways Ulster Canal Greenway project, which runs from Smithborough to Middletown, and the Shared Waters Enhancement and Loughs Legacy (SWELL) Project, which will deliver a programme of measures including Wastewater Treatment Works upgrades to improve water quality within Carlingford Lough.

The Executive will continue to assess the impacts of the result of the UK referendum on EU membership both immediate and longer-term and to prepare accordingly. In the interim, the Minister of Finance has stated that business should continue as usual for both the INTERREG V and PEACE IV programmes.

Department of Justice

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many Serious Further Offence Reviews have been conducted in each of the last five financial years; and (ii) how many identified concerns were found in relation to offender management and/or monitoring prior to reoffending.

(AQW 1965/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice):

- (i) There have been eleven Serious Further Offence Reviews undertaken in the last five financial years broken down as follows:

Financial Year	No of Serious Further Offence Reviews Undertaken
2015/2016	2
2014/2015	0
2013/2014	3
2012/2013	1
2011/2012	5
Total	11

- (ii) Of the eleven reviews undertaken during the five year period minor concerns were identified in three.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice whether she has meet with the Parades Commission in the lead up to this year's parading season.

(AQW 1989/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I did not have any discussions with the Parades Commission in the lead up to this year's parading season. The Commission is an independent body appointed by the Secretary of State. It is not accountable to me, and I have no involvement in its determinations.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice whether she has met with the Chief Constable in relation to the issue of parades.
(AQW 1990/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have regular discussions with the Chief Constable about a range of issues including parading.

While I do not have direct responsibility for parading issues, I do have an interest in their impact on policing, justice and the community. I am greatly encouraged by the peaceful parading season this year, and grateful for the leadership shown by many of those involved. Their significant efforts have clearly succeeded in reducing tension and ensuring that, for the most part, the law was upheld.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Justice to outline the mechanism, if any, the Department has in place to monitor the mental health and wellbeing of prison officers.

(AQW 2043/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department takes seriously the health and wellbeing of all staff, including Prison Officers, employed in what can be a demanding and challenging environment. When an employee indicates that they are suffering from stress or anxiety or their manager raises concern in this regard a stress intervention meeting is arranged with them to identify the sources of the stress/anxiety and, where possible, agree potential interventions. Other support mechanisms available include a dedicated Staff Welfare Service, access to the Occupational Health Service and a confidential counselling service provided by Carecall. These interventions are provided to staff to supplement the support and treatment available through the National Health Service.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many licensed prisoners have been recalled following a breach of license terms and/or reoffending; and (ii) of these, how many were categorised as scheduled offenders; broken down in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 2109/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An offender is recalled to custody, on revocation of their licence, when it is assessed that the current risk they may pose to the public has increased significantly and can no longer be safely managed in the community.

The table below provides a breakdown of the number of offenders recalled by the Department of Justice for the last five calendar years. The details of their index offences are not held centrally and extraction of that information would require a manual search of each individual's file. The answer to part (ii) of the question could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Year	Total number of recalled offenders *
2011	100
2012	134
2013	197
2014	187
2015	176
2016#	100

Key:

* This does not include offenders recalled by the Secretary of State for the Northern Ireland Office

Correct as at 1 July 2016

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will provide or place in the Assembly Library the reports on all instances of Serious Further Offence Reviews in each of last five financial years in which issues of concern were identified.

(AQW 2110/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Reports on Serious Further Offence reviews, produced by Probation Board for Northern Ireland, contain sensitive and personal information about individuals, including the victims of crime.

To provide or place copies of the reports in the Assembly Library may lead to the identification of these individuals, and breach their rights under the Data Protection Act 1988. As a result, I am unable to do so.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department will publish the business case for redeveloping Magilligan Prison.

(AQW 2149/16-21)

Ms Sugden: An outline business case for the Redevelopment of Magilligan Prison was approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel in January 2015.

This is an internal document, which contains information relating to the development of government policy, as well as commercially sensitive information, so it will not be published by my Department.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Justice to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from her Department; broken down by year for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2158/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh that received funding from the Department of Justice (DOJ), including its Agencies but not its arm's-length bodies, in each of the last five financial years are listed below:

2015-16

- Education Other Than At School (EOTAS)

2014-15

- None

2013-14

- Community Restorative Justice Ireland – Newry/Armagh
- Express Youth
- St Patricks Youth Club Keady

2012-13

- SPRING Trust Ltd
- The Arts Providers Partnership, Co Down
- St John Bosco Regional Youth Centre
- West Armagh Consortium

2011-12

- None

The DOJ also provides funding to a range of voluntary and community organisations who deliver services across Northern Ireland. Some of these services may be available in Newry and Armagh.

The DOJ also provides funding to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships who work with a wide range of bodies including voluntary and community organisations, some of which may be in Newry and Armagh.

The Department's Assets Recovery Community Scheme also allocates money to voluntary and community groups through Policing and Community Safety Partnerships or Department of Justice agencies. Details of allocations can be found on the Department of Justice website at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/asset-recovery-community-schemes>

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Justice whether she will make a statement on her Department's current position concerning the legacy structures envisaged within the Stormont House Agreement.

(AQW 2174/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I recognise the importance of reaching agreement on dealing with the Past, both to victims' families and to our wider community. My officials continue to engage in discussions to finalise outstanding policy issues to progress the legislation to establish the Historical Investigations Unit.

I am committed to working with Executive colleagues and the two governments to ensure delivery of the justice elements of the Stormont House Agreement.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice when work is likely to start on the rebuilding of Magilligan Prison.

(AQW 2184/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am committed to providing a redeveloped prison at Magilligan to enable the Northern Ireland Prison Service to deliver essential programmes to address re-offending behaviour; to meet Disability Discrimination Act standards; and to replace the existing infrastructure, which has outlived its useful life and is expensive and inefficient to staff, maintain and operate.

An outline business case for the Redevelopment of Magilligan Prison was approved by the Department of Finance and Personnel in January 2015.

Project Delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. This will be considered as part of the Budget 2016 settlement.

I will not be able to confirm when the rebuilding of Magilligan Prison will commence until capital funding is secured.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice whether she plans to reform legal aid following the findings of the recent Northern Ireland Audit Office report.

(AQW 2185/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The report from the Comptroller and Auditor General recognised that progress has already been made on reform of legal aid. This includes reduction in the fees paid to legal representatives in the criminal courts; the removal of provision for Very High Cost Cases; and reform to the levels of representation in both the civil and criminal courts. Further reforms to fees paid in the civil courts are at an advanced stage and will be progressed in the coming months and work is on-going in a number of other areas.

I will continue with the reform programme that has already commenced. I am committed to ensuring that the most vulnerable in our society continue to be afforded proportionate representation paid for by the public purse. I am however equally resolute that those who can afford to pay for their own representation should do so.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration she has given to commissioning research into the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in prisons and the youth justice system.
(AQW 2193/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Hydebank Wood College is currently consulting with The Rainbow Project to seek advice and guidance on issues surrounding the lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people in custody. The Rainbow Project has welcomed the approach and will attend Equality & Diversity meetings within the College.

It is considered inappropriate to ask a young person their sexual orientation. However if a young person chooses to declare their sexual orientation to Youth Justice Agency staff, there are procedures in place to ensure that they are managed safely and effectively.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Justice to detail the funding awarded by her Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.
(AQW 2262/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Department of Justice (DOJ) has not funded any capital or resource projects in the Ardoyne area within the last three financial years.

The DOJ does provide funding to a range of voluntary and community organisations who deliver services across Northern Ireland. Some of these services may be available in the Ardoyne area.

The DOJ also provides funding to Policing and Community Safety Partnerships who work with a wide range of bodies including voluntary and community organisations, some of which may be in the Ardoyne area.

The Department's Assets Recovery Community Scheme also allocates money to voluntary and community groups through Policing and Community Safety Partnerships or Department of Justice agencies. Details of allocations can be found on the Department of Justice website at: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/asset-recovery-community-schemes>

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, given his lack of engagement with Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland following release from a custodial sentence in March 2016, to order a Serious Case Review into Mark Leslie Hay and the circumstances of alleged reoffending.
(AQW 2266/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Where an offender is released from prison at the expiry of their statutory licence period, and no other court mandated monitoring requirements have been imposed, there are no legislative sanctions which can be applied to compel adherence with risk management plans under the public protection arrangements. In such cases, risk management has to focus on encouraging compliance with measures aimed at minimising current and future risk.

Statutory provision has however been made in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 for the introduction of a new civil order – the Violent Offences Prevention Order (VOPO) – for qualifying offenders which can be imposed on conviction or on subsequent application by police to the court where it is considered necessary for the purpose of protecting the public from the risk of serious violent harm caused by an individual. If a person fails to comply with a requirement or prohibition in a VOPO it is an offence and they are liable, on summary conviction, to a term of up to 6 months imprisonment and, on conviction on indictment, to a term of imprisonment not exceeding 5 years. The provisions for VOPO's are scheduled to be commenced in October 2016.

The Strategic Management Board, responsible for oversight of the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI), has the authority to commission Serious Case Reviews. Although the alleged new offending in this case was not for a PPANI eligible offence, and there is no suggestion of a failure in risk management, I understand an internal review will be conducted to identify if there are any learning points that can be applied to future operational practice.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the future of Limavady Courthouse.
(AQW 2277/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The decision to close Limavady court hearing centre was taken by my predecessor following public consultation in 2012 and ratified by him in February 2016.

My predecessor's decision to rationalise the court estate is now the subject of judicial review proceedings in the High Court in Belfast. Consequently it is not my intention to proceed with court closures pending the outcome of those proceedings. As the rationalisation of the court estate is now the subject of legal proceedings it would not be appropriate for me to comment further at this stage.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the working group on fatal foetal abnormalities.
(AQW 2279/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Minister of Health and I agreed to the establishment of the interdepartmental working group and my officials attended the first meeting of the group on Thursday, 14 July. The group will report to both Ministers by the end of September 2016.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice whether her Department has considered conducting a review into maximum sentencing for road traffic offences that result in death.

(AQW 2322/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Review of Sentencing Policy which I announced on 9 June will include consideration of the appropriateness of the maximum penalty available for offences under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 which result in death.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 29 July 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Hussey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 53782/11-16, for a breakdown of the £199,000 spent on costs for the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board between August 2013 and 31 January 2016.
(AQW 186/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The table below provides a breakdown of costs associated with the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation Board from August 2013 to 31 January 2016.

Expenditure	FY 13-14 from: 1 Aug 13 £'000	FY14-15 Full Year £'000	FY15-16 to: 31 Jan 16 £'000	Overall Total £'000
Board Remuneration	61	83	70	214
Board Travel & Subsistence	2	1	2	5
Total Board Costs	63	84	72	219

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when they will convene the first meeting of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture & Tradition.
(AQW 939/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The first meeting of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition took place on 6 July 2016.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the £30m being held for dealing with the past, (i) what process is in place to achieve the agreement necessary to activate this expenditure; (ii) what Department has responsibility for this process; (iii) how and to whom the £30m will be distributed; and (iv) the anticipated timetable.
(AQW 956/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The £30million is part of the UK Government's £150million funding commitment to help fund the bodies to deal with the past. Release of the legacy funding is subject to agreement on the establishment of the new bodies. However, at the conclusion of the Fresh Start talks a number of key issues relating to the legacy of the past remained unresolved.

Mr Lunn asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact of leaving the European Union on the work of their Department's office in Brussels.
(AQO 9/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: It is important to ensure that this Executive is well placed to seek to influence a positive outcome for ourselves in terms of the outcome of the EU referendum.

The Brussels office will continue to have an important role to play in ensuring the interests of the Executive are well represented during any negotiations or other engagement.

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how much funding has been allocated for the operation of the Commission on Flag, Culture, Identity and Tradition in 2016-17.
(AQW 1133/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Funding for the work of the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition Commission is part of the UK Government contribution to dealing with the past. Release of this legacy funding is subject to agreement on the establishment of the new bodies and has not yet been released by HM Treasury.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their department has starting sourcing and collating statistics on the number of persons who attended residential institutions within the remit of the Hart Inquiry; and the number of residents of those institutions that are still alive.

(AQW 1397/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry is wholly independent. Under the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 the conduct and procedure of the Inquiry is the responsibility of the Inquiry Chairperson. The report to the Executive is due in January 2017 and further information will be available then. In the meantime the matter you have raised should be directed to the Inquiry Chairperson Sir Anthony Hart.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the actions their Department has taken in relation to the independent Panel of Experts on Redress reports What Survivors Want from Redress and A Compensation Framework for Historic Abuse in Residential Institutions.

(AQW 1405/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We have noted the content of the two Reports prepared by the Panel: "What Survivors Want From Redress" and "A Compensation Framework for Historic Abuses in Residential Institutions".

The Historical Abuse Inquiry will, however, be making its recommendations, including a fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, in its report to the Executive in January 2017. The nature or level of any potential redress, as stipulated in the Inquiry's terms of reference, is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the Inquiry's report.

We cannot, therefore, make any further comment regarding the two Reports prepared by the Panel. We understand that the Panel sent copies of both reports to the HIA Inquiry.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any departmental consultation with relevant experts in relation to models of financial address for victims of institutional abuse.

(AQW 1406/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office has not engaged in consultation on this matter as it would be inappropriate to pre-empt the Inquiry's findings.

The Inquiry will be making its recommendations, including a fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, in its report to the Executive in January 2017. The nature or level of any potential redress, as stipulated in the Inquiry's terms of reference, is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the Inquiry's report.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the work their Department have taken in relation to models of and costings for financial redress for victims of institutional abuse.

(AQW 1407/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Historical Institution Abuse Inquiry will be making its recommendations, including a fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, in its report to the Executive in January 2017. The nature or level of any potential redress, as stipulated in the Inquiry's terms of reference, is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the Inquiry's report.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all (i) completed; (ii) in progress; and (iii) future capital projects funded through their Department in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1434/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The information sought relating to capital projects funded by the Department in Fermanagh and South Tyrone is as follows:

- (i) Capital Projects – Completed
 - Contribution of funding towards the development of an exemplar play project facility at Fermanagh Lakeland Forum.
- (ii) Capital Projects – In Progress
 - Social Investment Fund
 - Extension to Fermanagh House to provide a centre which will have at its core the linking of people and communities across rural Fermanagh with regional and voluntary sector service providers in Fermanagh.
 - Refurbishment and extension to the Cathedral Hall to allow increased community activities to be facilitated leading to social and community development.
 - Refurbishment of Clogher Orange Lodge as part of the wider sustaining the Infrastructure Project.
 - Small refurbishment works to at least 26 premises across the Western Zone including Fermanagh and South Tyrone. The premises will be identified through an application process which is due to commence shortly.

(iii) Capital Projects – Future

Currently no further projects have been committed.

Mr O'Dowd asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) how many Urban Villages have been supported under the Together: Building a United Community scheme; (ii) if the scheme is currently open to new applications; and (iii) are there any plans to reopen the scheme to new applications.

(AQW 1638/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: To date, five Urban Village areas have been announced:

- Colin (West Belfast);
- EastSide (East Belfast);
- Sandy Row, Donegall Pass and the Markets (South Belfast);
- Ardoyne and Greater Ballysillan (North Belfast); and
- Bogside, Fountain and Bishop Street (Derry~Londonderry).

The Urban Village Initiative is at an early stage of delivery and there are no plans at this time to extend it to other areas. However, successful approaches developed by the Initiative to improve good relations outcomes will inform interventions in other areas where there is a history of deprivation and community tension.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all meetings they have had with trade unions in the last three months; including (i) a list of attendees; and (ii) the subjects covered.

(AQW 1690/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We met with representatives of NIPSA in June to discuss developments in relation to the future organisation and provision of electoral services.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the projects (a) in progress; and (b) scheduled for the future in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by their Department, that have received EU funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) for their assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Executive Office.

(AQW 1745/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Projects in relation to the EU PEACE III programme have been completed.

The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The eligible area for this cross-border programme consists of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. The application process is currently ongoing, and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council has been allocated €3,357,781 and Mid Ulster District Council €3,953,614 for their local Peace Action Plans under the PEACE IV Programme. These Councils are currently planning how to utilise those funds.

It is anticipated that all EU Programmes, including PEACE IV, will form part of the discussions that are to take place with the European Union during the upcoming negotiations following the recent referendum decision. In the interim, the SEUPB will continue to implement the delivery of PEACE IV as Managing Authority for the programme.

Mr Mullan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future in East Derry that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for their assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive.

(AQW 1820/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Projects in relation to the EU PEACE III programme have been completed.

The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The eligible area for this cross-border programme consists of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. The application process is currently ongoing, and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

Causeway Coast and Glens District Council has been allocated €4,502,085 and the neighbouring Derry and Strabane District Council €7,964,209 for their local Peace Action Plans under the PEACE IV Programme. Applications under this priority of the PEACE IV Programme are currently under assessment.

It is anticipated that all EU Programmes, including PEACE IV, will form part of the discussions that are to take place with the European Union during the upcoming negotiations following the recent referendum decision. In the interim, the SEUPB will continue to implement the delivery of PEACE IV as Managing Authority for the programme.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future, that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii)

for their assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive.

(AQW 1824/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Projects in relation to the EU PEACE III programme have been completed.

The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The eligible area for this cross-border programme consists of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. The application process is currently ongoing, and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

It is anticipated that all EU Programmes, including PEACE IV, will form part of the discussions that are to take place with the European Union during the upcoming negotiations following the recent referendum decision. In the interim, the SEUPB will continue to implement the delivery of PEACE IV as Managing Authority for the programme.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what work will be commissioned in preparation for any extra powers which will come to the Executive in consequence of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union.

(AQW 1836/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: It is too early to be definitive but the priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they will commission a programme of work to identify the legislation imposing European Union directives which should be repealed when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 1875/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The matter of legislation is one of a wide range of issues resulting from the EU referendum which will require detailed scrutiny and consideration in the weeks and months ahead.

We have already commissioned the Head of the Civil Service to establish senior teams within each department to examine the potential implications for their functions, legislation and regulations. We have also asked him to put an overarching administrative and political governance structure in place that will report directly to us.

We are agreed and determined that our unique regional circumstances must be accounted for in any negotiations with the EU.

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the impact of the EU referendum result on race relations; and how they will prevent any deterioration.

(AQW 1956/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We very much value and respect our minority ethnic communities. They enrich our lives and will continue to make a considerable contribution to our society in the future. We remain committed to the vision expressed in the Racial Equality Strategy of a society which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, free from racism, and where we can share a common sense of belonging. This vision is unaffected by the result of the referendum. We will consider the practical implications as new arrangements are negotiated and take effect.

There remains no excuse for racism in any of its manifestations. We unequivocally condemn all racist attacks and strongly encourage all victims to report any racist incident, however minor.

Mr Dickson asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the plans in place to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are effectively represented at a national and European level in the coming months.

(AQW 2029/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected.

The Head of the Civil Service met with key stakeholders in Brussels on 30 June and 1 July. Detailed discussions will follow at a suitable point to seek to ensure that our specific circumstances are accounted for in any new arrangements that are developed.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place with the US administration regarding Northern Ireland's ability to attract Foreign Direct investment from the USA following the result of the EU referendum.

(AQW 2063/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Director of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Washington, D.C. has been in contact with the Obama administration to reiterate our strength as an investment location.

The Director has also been in regular contact with the British Embassy and its consular network to ensure that we are included when assuaging any concerns regarding access to the EU marketplace for overseas companies. The Bureau is currently working with InvestNI colleagues across the US to promote the Northern Ireland Business Opportunity.

The Bureau has extensive contacts in Washington, D.C. with the Obama administration and Capitol Hill and it will continue to promote our interests.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail each implication of the European Union referendum result for European Union engagement and representation in the (i) short term; and (ii) medium term.

(AQW 2120/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

Ms Hanna asked First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) why there is no mention of the Racial Equality Strategy in the proposed Programme for Government 2016-2021; and (ii) how the Racial Equality Strategy will be reflected in the outcomes and indicators of the forthcoming Programme for Government?

(AQW 2127/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government Framework sets out, in outcome terms, the improvements in wellbeing to which the Executive aspires for everyone in society.

It expressly does not set out the particular strategies, plans and actions that will be implemented to support the achievement of these outcomes. Instead, it provides a framework, within which a collaborative engagement process will occur to determine the most effective action that can be taken, by Government and others, to achieve progress.

The Executive remains committed to the implementation of its Racial Equality Strategy, and will be working over the coming weeks to explore how its implementation can support the achievement of Programme for Government outcomes, in particular with reference to addressing the issues faced by minority ethnic people.

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the target timetables set for each Department to appoint a Racial Equality Champion and produce a Departmental Action Plan under the Racial Equality Strategy.

(AQW 2132/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A Racial Equality Champion for each department has been appointed.

As stated in the Racial Equality Strategy, we will not require departments or local authorities to draw up their own action plans, although they may wish to do so.

The Racial Equality Subgroup will have a significant role to play in advising the Executive Office and other Government departments on the implementation of the Strategy.

The Subgroup will be tasked with working with departments (and vice-versa) to develop an implementation plan, and monitor and review progress on implementation. Government departments, with the assistance and advice of the Subgroup, will identify actions, consistent with the principles of the Strategy, which will contribute to the achievement of the outcomes. The focus will be on identifying, delivering and measuring actions that deliver real improvement.

We have recently received all of the nominations for the Racial Equality Subgroup and the first meeting is being arranged for September 2016.

Mr McNulty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail all voluntary and community organisations in Newry and Armagh which have received funding from the Executive; broken down by year for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2160/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office, previously OFMDFM, funded various groups in the Newry and Armagh areas within the past five years. Details are provided in the following table.

Year	Name of Group
15/16	Select Vestry, St Patrick's Parish, Church of Ireland
	Silverbridge Harps Gaelic Football Club
	Pearse OG Gaelic Athletic Association
	Kilcluney LOL 132

Year	Name of Group
	Armagh Harps Gaelic Football Club
	Market Hill Community Festival Committee
14/15	Select Vestry, St Patrick's Parish, Church of Ireland
	Silverbridge Harps Gaelic Football Club
	Pearse OG Gaelic Athletic Association
	Kilcluney LOL 132
	Armagh Travellers Support Group
	Shared Areas
13/14	Sticky Fingers
	Armagh Travellers Support Group
12/13	N/A
11/12	Armagh Travellers Support Group

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the monetary breakdown and number of awards made by the Victims and Survivors Service through the Individual Needs Programme for each of the six schemes operating in 2015-16 ((a) Support for the Bereaved; (b) Support for the Injured 1; (c) Support for the Injured 2; (d) Carers; (e) Financial Assistance; and (f) Disability Aids); broken down by (i) parliamentary constituency; (ii) victims and survivors located in the Republic of Ireland; (iii) victims and survivors located in Great Britain; and (iv) those outside the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2175/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The monetary breakdown and number of awards made by the Victims and Survivors Service (VSS) through the Individual Needs Programme for each of the six schemes requested is detailed in the table below.

Details of the total funding committed for 2015-2016 and the payments issued to clients as of June 2016 have been provided. The VSS continues to follow up with clients on 2015-16 awards where commitment has been made, but payment has not yet been claimed.

The VSS does not hold details of awards broken down by parliamentary constituency. The number of awards made within the jurisdiction through the VSS Individual Needs Programme in 2015-16 has therefore been provided.

Scheme	Funding Committed	Payments Issued (at June 2016)	Total Number of Awards	Within the Jurisdiction	Republic of Ireland (ROI)	Great Britain (UK)	Outside UK & ROI
(a) Support for the Bereaved	£1,295,908	£1,205,607	2591	2417	60	102	12
(b) Support for the Injured (DLA High Rate)	£891,000	£828,228	594	583	2	9	0
(c) Support for the injured (DLA Middle Rate)	£303,000	£282,128	606	598	0	8	0
(d) Support for Carers	£255,000	£248,001	510	499	4	7	0
(e) Financial Assistance	£2,184,480	£2,184,480	2664	2599	19	46	0
(f) Disability Aids	£82,117	£73,559	26	25	0	1	0
Total	£5,011,505	£4,822,003	6991	6721	85	173	12

Ms Mallon asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the funding awarded by their Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2261/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Executive Office, previously OFMDFM, funded various groups in the Ardoyne Area within the past three years totalling £766,817.67, of which £691,069.35 was resource funding and £75,748.32 capital funding. Details are provided in the table below.

Year	Capital		Resource	
	Name	Amount	Name	Amount
2015/16	Ashton Community Trust (Childcare and Family Support Project)	£68,604.56	Ashton Community Trust (Ethical, Development Trust Project)	£97,316.39
			Tides Training	£36,880.00
			174 Trust	£48,000.00
			Ardoyne Youth Club	£40,000.00
			Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	£91,000.00
			Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership	£47,000.00
2014/15	Ashton Community Trust (Childcare and Family Support Project)	£7,143.76	Ashton Community Trust (Ethical, Development Trust Project)	£5,000.00
			Ardoyne Youth Club	£20,000.00
			John Paul II Youth Club	£500.00
			Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	£71,185.00
			Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership	£41,392.50
2013/14			Tides Training	£27,190.00
			Ardoyne Youth Club	£32,953.86
			Ardoyne Youth Providers Forum	£83,953.20
			Upper Ardoyne Community Partnership	£48,698.40
Total		£75,748.32		£691,069.35

Mrs Overend asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline their position on the introduction of a special pension for people seriously injured in the troubles.
(AQW 2316/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Stormont House Agreement stated that "Further work will be undertaken to seek an acceptable way forward on the proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims in Northern Ireland".

The Fresh Start Agreement reaffirms the Executive's, the UK Government's and the Irish Government's commitment to full and fair implementation of the Stormont House Agreement provisions on the past.

We remain fully committed to seeking a resolution on the outstanding legacy issues as quickly as possible. This includes the proposal for a pension for severely physically injured victims in Northern Ireland.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the community and voluntary organisations in Fermanagh and South Tyrone that received funding from her Department, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 352/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): From 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2016, the Department provided £6,140,456.01 to voluntary and community organisations in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency. Details of the organisations which received funding and the amounts received are detailed in the table below. You should note that information provided for 2015/16 has not yet been audited and may be subject to change.

Voluntary and Community Funding 2011-2016**Challenge Fund**

- Alliance Youth Works
- Bellanaleck Community Group
- Beltrim Charitable Trust
- Benburb District Community Association
- Conservation Volunteers
- Devenish Partnership Forum
- Enniskillen Angling Club
- Erne & Melvin Enhancement company (EMEC)
- Erne and Melvin Enhancement Company (EMEC)
- Erne East Community Partnership Ltd
- Erne Rivers Trust
- Fermanagh Red Squirrel Group (FRSG)
- Field Studies Council
- Field Studies Council (FSC)
- Hearth Revolving Fund
- Lough Erne Wildfowlers Council
- Magheramason Community Development Association
- Molly and Mia Foundation
- National Trust
- National Trust, Fermanagh Properties
- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (N.I.)
- Pettigo and District Angling Association
- Positive Futures
- River Blackwater Catchment Trust
- Share Discovery Village
- Speedwell Trust
- Ulster Workhouse and Famine Trust Lisnaskea
- Willowbank Organic Producers Ltd

Farm Woodland Premium Scheme

- Fermanagh County Board GAA

Natural Environment Fund

- Beltrim Charitable Trust

Natural Heritage Fund

- RSPB

Natural Heritage Grant Programme

- Beltrim Charitable Trust
- Conservation Volunteers
- National Trust

Northern Ireland Regional Food Programme

- Clogher Valley Agricultural Society
- Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- Fermanagh Farming Society

Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme Axis 3

- Aghaloo and Blackwater Community Association Ltd
- ARC Healthy Living Centre Limited
- Aughakillymaude Community Association
- Aughnacloy Development Association
- Aughnacloy Playgroup Limited
- Ballinamallard Fisher Park
- Bawn Development Association
- Belleek Chamber of Commerce
- Bloomhill Rural Development Association
- Caledon Regeneration Partnership Ltd
- Clonmore Regeneration Group Ltd
- Coa Community Group
- Countryside Recreation Northern Ireland
- Derrygonnelly Community Centre Support Limited
- Drumskinney Rural Action Group
- Early Years, the organisation for young people
- Fermanagh Citizens Advice Bureau
- Fountain NI Ltd
- Friends Forever Pre-School
- Kinawley Community Hall Association
- Knockninny Credit Union Ltd
- Lakeland Community Care Ltd
- Little Angels Den
- Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland (N.I.)
- Rainbow Daycare (Eglish) Ltd
- South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association
- The National Trust
- Upper Lough Erne Tourism Development Association
- Lisnaskea Community Enterprises Ltd.

Targeting Rural Poverty and Social Isolation

- Acorn Womens Group
- Aghaloo and Blackwater Community Association Ltd
- Aisling Centre
- ARC Healthy Living Centre Limited
- Aughnacloy Primary School PTA
- Aughnakillymaude Community Association
- Carricklongfield Cultural Group
- Carrowshee Park /Sylvian Hill Community Association
- Coa Community Group
- Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network incorporating Community Organisation of South Tyrone and Areas
- Dromard Orange Lodge

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| ■ Fawney Heroes LOL | ■ Rainbow Playgroup |
| ■ Fermanagh Rural Community Network | ■ South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP) |
| ■ Glendurragh Childcare Services | ■ The Lakeland Players |
| ■ Lakeland Community Care Ltd | ■ The Sport Centre Management Group |
| ■ Rainbow Daycare (Eglisli) Ltd | ■ Grand Total |

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in relation to Article 27 (2) of the Waste and Contaminated Land (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 requiring waste tyres to be removed, to detail (i) how many notices have been initiated; (ii) to whom; and whether they were successful.

(AQW 1617/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency's (NIEA) Regulation Unit has issued 1 Article 27 Notice since January 2012 and as the relevant case remains ongoing further details cannot be released as this may be prejudicial to any future court proceedings. In addition, NIEA's Environmental Crime Unit have issued a further 77 Article 27 Notices from 2013 to date broken down as follows:-

- | | |
|-----------------------|----|
| ■ 2016 (to June 2016) | 11 |
| ■ 2015 | 26 |
| ■ 2014 | 30 |
| ■ 2013 | 10 |

All of the 77 notices issued by the Environmental Crime Unit above have reached a successful conclusion in that the respondent has either complied with the notice or has been the subject of further action, including legal proceedings.

It is not possible to detail to whom the notices were issued as this could entail a breach of the Data Protection Act or prejudice ongoing criminal proceedings.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she intends to reconult the European Commission on the legality of her Department entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ulster Farmers' Union which could see polluters no longer facing prosecution for less serious pollution offences.

(AQW 1702/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As you are aware NIEA is the competent control authority for a number of Statutory Management Requirements under the Basic Payment Scheme and carries out inspections of farm businesses through the cross-compliance programme. In addition NIEA investigates pollution incidents and other environmental issues, carries out routine monitoring of waterways and habitats. NIEA will continue to fulfil these statutory functions and consider that they will be best achieved through a partnership-approach while operating within all legislative requirements. NIEA will continue to apply its enforcement and prosecution policy in relation to pollution incidents.

I can assure you that any MOU between the UFU and NIEA will only contain measures which will deliver higher levels of environmental compliance, contribute to achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and increase the profitability of farm businesses through sustainable farming and innovative, resource efficient practices.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 928/16-21, for a breakdown of the £19.9 million by claim detailing the (i) reason; (ii) value; (iii) the year the payment was made; and (iv) the year the allowance was made.

(AQW 1714/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) Disallowance is applied where the EU Commission determines there were deficiencies in the controls operated by my department in the administration and control of EU funded schemes. It is good financial practice to anticipate and identify the potential cost of disallowance and set aside resource to cover this.
- (ii), (iii) and (iv) The £19.9m accrued for potential disallowance was made up of charges of £10.3m and £19.2m in 2013/14 and 2015/16 respectively. This was offset by a reduction in the disallowance of £9.6m charged to 2014/15 related to a reduction in the calculated risk to the fund. In addition, my department was permitted to offset historic recoveries of Single Farm Payments against the disallowance charge.

Please note that following the audit of the 2015/16 Annual Report and Accounts, the disallowance charge for 2015/16 has reduced slightly from £19.2m to £19.0m. This reduces the overall charge for the three year period in question from £19.9m to £19.7m.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what immediate impact the vote to leave the European Union will have on the agricultural community.

(AQW 1758/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The movements in exchange rates between the sterling and both Euro and Dollar have had a positive impact for both farmers and food processors. The current arrangements in terms of support for agriculture and trading relationships

will continue as they are for the next two years at least and we have this time to start to develop the new support and trading relationships that will carry us beyond this interim period. Northern Ireland's interests will be pursued within the UK rather than within a group of 28 countries with disparate agendas, so we will have greater influence and a better opportunity to secure a position that properly reflects our specific circumstances. We will be focusing not only on the support arrangements for agriculture, but also the trading relationships, both inward and outward, which will be forged with the remaining EU and with the rest of the world. In the immediate aftermath of the referendum result, it is understandable that there is significant uncertainty and concern, but there is also a great opportunity now to start to look ahead to consider the sort of arrangements that would best meet our needs in what will be a completely new policy landscape. We need to approach this opportunity with confidence and with a clear sense of what can be achieved.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future in East Derry that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for her assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

(AQW 1767/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs is currently completing projects which have received European Union (EU) Funding to a value of £947,380 under Forestry Grants (£118,000) and the Horizon 2020 Research Scheme (£829,380) in East Londonderry.

As the Forestry Grants funding relates to 2016-17, it is anticipated that there is no risk to that EU funding.

Given the nature of Horizon 2020 Research, this funding extends beyond 2016-17. The Department of Business Innovation and Skills provided some further clarity on such funding in a statement on 28 June 2016. This advised that: 'The referendum result has no immediate effect on those applying to or participating in Horizon 2020. UK participants can continue to apply to the programme in the usual way. The future of UK access to European science funding will be a matter for future discussions. Government is determined to ensure that the UK continues to play a leading role in European and international research'.

As the Executive has not yet agreed any budgets beyond 2016-17, it is not possible to set out any other future projects that may receive EU funding at this stage. The implications of Brexit on EU funding in my Department will be assessed as the position evolves.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she will take the opportunity to consult with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the workability and implications of entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ulster Farmers Union which could see polluters no longer facing prosecution for less serious offences.

(AQW 1782/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I can assure you that any MOU between the UFU and NIEA will only contain measures which will deliver higher levels of environmental compliance, contribute to achieving the objectives of the Water Framework Directive and increase the profitability of farm businesses through sustainable farming and innovative, resource efficient practices.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, pursuant to AQW 48915/11-16, why the projected savings have not yet been realised.

(AQW 1859/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Some £3.3m savings from the Brucellosis Eradication Programme were projected for the first full year following OBF status, 2016-17.

More detailed analysis of the 2015 Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) from which early projections arose shows some £16.3m savings forecast over the first 5 years post-OBF should have been incremental rather than averaged and as such the projected saving for year one post-OBF was some £2.9m.

Current projection of savings for 2016-17, as stated in AQW882/16-21, is some £2.6m although actual Programme outturn will not be known until after the end of this financial year.

Profiling rather than averaging the 5 year savings in the RIA would have better reflected further deregulation of the Programme anticipated in 2017-18 when beef herd blood sampling should move from biennial to triennial. This is the main reason why the originally projected savings have not been realised in year 1.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the funding awarded by her Department to (i) capital projects; and (ii) resource projects, in the Ardoyne area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2143/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: From April 2013 to 31 March 2016, the Department did not award any funding to projects in the Ardoyne area.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a progress update on each of the eleven Local Action Groups.

(AQW 2222/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Please note that there are only 10 Local Action Groups (LAGs). All have now completed and had approved a Local Rural Development Strategy and accompanying implementation plan. This allowed the Department to issue each LAG with a formal contract to deliver LEADER on the ground, these contracts have been signed and returned. I can advise you that nine of the ten LAG's have opened (and in some cases closed) their first call for applications for the Rural Business Investment Scheme. Assessment panels for this scheme have started and I would hope that the first letters of offer will issue at the start of August.

The first LAG (Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership) has also opened their call for the Rural Basic Services Scheme, we are currently awaiting call opening dates for the remaining LAGs.

As regards the remaining LEADER schemes i.e. the Village Renewal and Rural Broadband Schemes my officials are awaiting confirmation of call opening and closing times from the various LAGs.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what assurances she can provide that the £80 million allocated to Priority 6 of the Rural Development Programme (2014-20) is protected, in light of the result of the European Union referendum.

(AQW 2223/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: It is not possible to say at this stage how the Rural Development Programme budget will be affected until we know the terms of the withdrawal treaty with the EU. EU funding, including Priority 6 of the NIRDP, will continue to be available in the period up to leaving the EU, the position after leaving the EU is unclear at this stage and will very much depend on the exit negotiations. However I expect these issues will become clearer during the negotiating process and I will ensure that Northern Ireland gets the best possible deal going forward.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline an indicative timeline for the implementation of the Rural Development Programme (2014-20) Priority 6 measures among rural business and community groups.

(AQW 2224/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Priority 6 is delivered under the LEADER mechanism, referred to as the bottom up approach ie local people as members of Local Action Groups (LAGs) making local decisions. During the appointment process for each LAG they were required to complete a Local Rural Development Strategy and an Implementation plan. These documents detailed their priorities for investing their allocations and a timetable. These were both approved when the LAGs were formally appointed and the implementation plan maps out the LAGs key milestones to achieve full investment of their allocation of funds.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline why beekeepers are prevented from registering on BeeBase, a register of beekeepers and beekeeping resource database accessible to beekeepers across the rest of the United Kingdom.

(AQW 2291/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: BeeBase was considered by DAERA as a bee health management tool. However uniquely Northern Ireland Bee Inspectors utilise mobile GPS enabled data capture which provides the capability for enhanced reporting and mapping of spatial data. Therefore my Department is progressing the development of a bespoke database for Northern Ireland bee keepers. This development has been discussed with both the Ulster Beekeepers Association and the Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers, who have been supportive of this initiative, and it is planned to provide regular updates as the interactive database is developed.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what her Department is doing to support beekeepers whose colonies are at risk from serious, notifiable and ultimately fatal diseases.

(AQW 2292/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Bee Health Inspectors in my Department support Northern Irelands beekeepers by delivering an annual programme of surveillance, inspection and enforcement for the control of notifiable pests and diseases in support of protecting bee health. This undertaken in conjunction with Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) who provide science and diagnostic support. This will be informed by a recently commissioned research project titled "Reducing the incidence of honeybee foulbrood diseases".

During 2015, inspectors completed inspections at 161 apiaries and following confirmation of notifiable disease at 44 apiaries we undertook disease control measures including colony destruction, and movement controls. Inspectors, with the support of local beekeepers, have established sentinel apiaries in support of the early detection of the quarantine pests Small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps mites, harmful pests not known to occur here. This has been supported with the inclusion of a regularly updated disease map on our web pages detailing the approximate locations of outbreaks, in order to make beekeepers aware of any increased risk of disease to their colonies.

Three additional inspectors are being trained which will increase support to beekeepers.

Beekeepers also have an important role in maintaining healthy colonies, and working in partnership with UBKA and INIB my officials identified have provided specialist training on disease identification. To date four events led by my Bee Health officials have taken place.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs given the outbreak of American Foul Brood (AFB); to outline why are there not more Bee Health Inspectors inspecting hives.
(AQW 2293/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Plant Health Directorate (PHD) in my Department delivers an annual programme of surveillance, inspection and enforcement for the control of notifiable pests and diseases in support of protecting bee health, with the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) providing science and diagnostic support.

During 2015, inspectors completed inspections at 161 apiaries and following confirmation of notifiable disease at 44 apiaries we undertook disease control measures including colony destruction, and movement controls. Inspectors, with the support of local beekeepers, have established sentinel apiaries in support of the early detection of the quarantine pests Small hive beetle and Tropilaelaps mites.

PHD has also identified the need for additional suitably qualified seasonal Bee Inspectors to support the Bee inspection functions. Three new inspectors are being trained, which will be a valuable additional resource to address the increase in brood disease findings in recent seasons.

Beekeepers also have an important role in maintaining healthy colonies, and working in partnership with UBKA and INIB my officials identified a need for Specialist training on disease identification. To date four events led by my Bee Health officials have taken place.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs given that honey bees are considered livestock, to outline why are they not registered in a way similar to cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry.
(AQW 2294/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In common with the rest of the UK, Northern Ireland does not have legislation which requires mandatory registration of bee keepers.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to list the capital items of expenditure that will be eligible for financial assistance under the Farm Business Improvement Scheme.
(AQW 2296/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Following completion of the business case approval process on 8 July, my officials are working to finalise the details of the eligible types of investment, and other key aspects of delivering the capital element of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme.

I plan to launch a Preparation Stage for the scheme, which over the summer will provide full details to potential applicants, in advance of the scheme opening in October this year.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline what actions she intends to take to help deliver sustainable prices for local agricultural producers.
(AQW 2299/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I do believe that those involved all along the supply chain should get a fair return for their work, including farmers. I intend engaging with the Department for Business Innovation and Skills review of the Groceries Code Adjudicator to see whether the extension of powers to enable the investigation of issues beyond those between the supermarkets and their primary suppliers would be appropriate.

I also recognise the importance of ensuring that our local agri-food sector has the tools and capacity to weather the current period of volatility, supporting a more sustainable industry in the future. In view of the difficulties farmers are currently experiencing, I have committed to making 95% of Basic Payments by the end of December and for the first time introducing advance payments from October.

I am also committed to helping the agri-food industry secure that sustainable future, and will be working alongside my Executive colleagues to deliver on key actions arising out of Going for Growth to support the industry in achieving its ambitions. My Department will continue work to build the resilience, efficiency and competitiveness of the sector through a range of measures, including education, training and research. In addition, we will continue to make the most of measures to support skills, innovation and capital investment in the sector through the new Rural Development Programme to help ensure that farmers are better equipped to meet the challenges ahead and take advantage of future market opportunities.

The recent weakening of sterling against the euro and the dollar will make our exports more competitive and should have a positive impact on prices. Following the decision to leave the EU, there are opportunities which will open up to the Northern Ireland agri-food sector in terms of trade and the growing world population. I will be working to ensure that the interests of the industry are properly considered in future negotiations between the UK, EU and other partners to ensure that we are best placed to take full advantage of the opportunities that arise.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she supports including a formal target for increasing woodland cover in the Programme for Government.

(AQW 2302/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Executive is seeking views on the draft Programme for Government Framework, and I would welcome responses from the forestry sector, including comments on the amount of new woodland cover required in Northern Ireland to help deliver this Programme. Forestry has potential to contribute to quite a few of the outcomes – living and working sustainably and protecting the environment by working in forestry, wood processing, and the small businesses that use forests for tourism and pre-school activities; by supplying wood as a substitute for fossil fuels; and living long, healthy active lives by taking exercise in our forests. The Programme depends on collaborative working to deliver these outcomes. I believe the forestry sector has the depth of collaborative working across the public, voluntary and private sectors to deliver a programme of planting and tending sustainable, resilient forests – but there is always more that can be done.

The Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 is a start. I recently announced re-opening of the next phase of the Forest Expansion Scheme which supports planting woodlands of five hectares or larger this coming winter. This provides farmers and landowners with a good opportunity for diversifying away from farming into forestry. It is also time to review the 2006 Forestry Strategy, and how it can be adapted to match the new Programme for Government. I hope the forestry sector will come forward with good ideas to help us improve the outcomes for Northern Ireland.

Department for Communities

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Communities to detail the level of financial support given to (i) all GAA clubs; and (ii) GAA clubs located in Newry and Armagh in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1896/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): Financial support has been given within the last five years to a number of GAA clubs, including some located in Newry and Armagh, from a number of areas within my Department and Sport NI, an arms length body of my Department.

- (i) During the last five years funding totalling £5,801,336.28 has been provided to GAA Clubs across Northern Ireland.

The Annual Figures, rounded to the nearest £, are:

2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
£565,149	£980,000	£1,881,023	£1,135,393	£1,239,769

- (ii) During the last five years funding totalling £1,529,436.77 has been provided to GAA clubs located in Newry and Armagh Constituency.

Annex A provides the details of financial support provided to individual clubs in each of the last five years.

Annex A

Financial Support to Clubs in Newry & Armagh Constituency

Organisation Name	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Grand Total
Annaghmore GAC	£2,890.00					£2,890.00
Annaghmore GFC				£700.00	£9,799.50	£10,499.50
Armagh Harps GFC	£3,133.00			£6,025.00		£9,158.00
Ballymartin GFC			£245,000.00			£245,000.00
Carrickcruppen GAC				£1,400.00	£1,190.00	£2,590.00
Clady Sean South GFC	£2,630.00		£826.00	£1200.00		£4,656.00
Craobh Rua Camlocha Hurling Club					£900.00	£900.00
Crossmaglen Rangers GFC			£245,000.00	£6,960.00		£251,960.00

Organisation Name	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Grand Total
Cumann Luthchleas Gael Uladh					£8,640.00	£8,640.00
Derrynoose GAC			£245,000.00	£1,200.00	£9,970.69	£256,170.69
Keady Michael Dwyers GFC			£1,500.00		£10,093.00	£11,593.00
Kilclief Ben Dearg GAC					£1,200.00	£1,200.00
Madden Raparees GAC			£1,480.00	£4,340.00		£5,820.00
Middletown GAC			£1,280.00			£1,280.00
Organisation Name	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Grand Total
O'Neills GFC				£1,150.00		£1,150.00
Peadar O Doinin GAA				£1,150.00	£500.00	£1,650.00
Pearse Óg GFC				£7,356.00		£7,356.00
St John Bosco					£439,364.61	£439,364.61
St Marys Granemore					£8,631.00	£8,631.00
St Patrick's GAC (Cullyhanna)				£3,736.00		£3,736.00
St Patrick's Dromintee			£50,500.00	£199,108.97		£249,608.97
Thomas Davis GAC			£500.00			£500.00
Tullysaran O'Connells GAC				£5,083.00		£5,083.00
Grand Total	£8,653.00	£0.00	£791,086.00	£239,408.97	£490,288.80	£1,529,436.77

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the support that will be provided for voluntary organisations such as Royal British Legion and Military and Police Support Omagh to provide advice services specific to welfare reform issues which will affect their members who suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and who would not be willing to engage with other agencies; and (ii) the financial assistance that will be provided to enable these organisations to avail of training on the specific changes that may affect their members.

(AQW 2049/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has been involved in activities supporting the service community about the welfare changes including attending an Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal Irish Aftercare staff training event where information was also provided on how Aftercare staff can access support and advice through the Make the Call benefit advice line. A presentation on the welfare changes was also delivered to members of the Northern Ireland branch of the Armed Forces Charity SSAFA.

As part of the Fresh Start Agreement, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to fund the recommendations of the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report to mitigate the impact of Welfare Reform.

The Report recommended that additional independent advice services should be put in place to help and support customers through the transitional period of Welfare Reform. The Executive made a commitment to provide £8million funding over four years to provide the additional services.

The Department is currently finalising arrangements with regional advice organisations to have those additional services in place. These organisations will be working with their frontline advice centres and a wide range of partner organisations to ensure that appropriate help and support is provided to people across Northern Ireland affected by forthcoming changes to the social security system as a result of Welfare Reform.

The Department is also currently working with the Advice Sector to identify training and awareness needs of organisations which provide advice. A training assistance package will be announced in the coming weeks.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department will continue to fund and support the Foyle Cup Tournament.

(AQW 2072/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is currently supporting the Foyle Cup football 2016 tournament by providing £16,000 funding in the 2016/17 financial year. Going forward support for Foyle Cup, like all funded projects, will be subject to review and budget availability.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities (i) how many families with children are living in hostel accommodation in North Belfast; and (ii) what is the average length of time families spend on the social housing waiting list.

(AQW 2171/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) As at 6th July 2016, there were 71 families with children resident in hostel accommodation in North Belfast.
- (ii) The Northern Ireland Housing Executive holds waiting list data on a range of household types. The attached table details the average length of time those household types spent on the social housing waiting list for the 12 months to 31 March 2016.

Household Composition	Allocations for NIHE North Belfast Local Office for 1 year to 31/03/16		
	Number	Mean Average Months on the Waiting List at the Point of Allocation	Median Average Months on the Waiting List at the Point of Allocation
Large Family Household (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 3 or more persons aged 0-15 or 3 or more persons aged 16 or over and 2 or more persons aged 0-15)	34	17.5	13.5
Small Family Household (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 1 or 2 persons aged 0-15)	160	21.7	13.5
Large Adult Household (3 or more persons aged 16 or over with or without 1 person aged 0-15)	<10	18.3	13.5
Small Adult Household (2 persons aged 16-59)	12	16.7	15.5
Elderly Household (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 1 or both of whom aged 60 or over)	50	19.7	6.0
Single Household (1 person aged 16-59)	310	16.2	11.0

Please Note: <10 are cases where numbers are less than 10

* Totals minus cases where there are less than 10

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for Communities what forecasting work his Department has carried out to identify the number of homes, with children, that will be negatively impacted by Welfare Reform.

(AQW 2199/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of an ongoing monitoring process across a range of reforms of the welfare system my Department has produced a range of information booklets for the potential impact of the Welfare Reform agenda in Northern Ireland. These information booklets include forecasts for a number of measures which will impact on both homes and family units. Assessments will include both positive and negative impacts and can be found at the following link: <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/welfare-changes-briefing>

More recently the Department for Work and Pensions with support from the Department for Communities have produced a range of impact assessments to support the passage of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and the Welfare Reform and Work (Northern Ireland) Order 2016 legislation through Westminster and these can be found at the following link: <http://origin-www.legislation.gov.uk/ukia?title=northern%20ireland>

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Communities whether he will support the provision of defibrillators in public spaces, including alongside tow paths, on cycle routes and in public parks.

(AQW 2210/16-21)

Mr Givan: As Minister for Communities I would encourage the widest possible access to Automated External Defibrillators (AEDS) at as many public locations as possible including those you have highlighted.

Public access to defibrillation is primarily a matter for the Minister for Health under the terms of objective No6 of the Community Resuscitation Strategy 2014. However, my Department through its Sports Policy Branch, has led by example by encouraging increased AED provision across the sports sector and supporting the mapping of AEDs to the NIAS database. My Department has also ensured that AEDs are available at many Library locations and at Museums and that staff have been trained in AED use along with Cardio- Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR).

The British Heart Foundation in Northern Ireland is encouraging everyone's involvement in the annual 'Restart a Heart Day' in October 2016. I would echo that call and encourage other Departments, including the Department for Health, District Councils and other stakeholders, to follow our lead in supporting the extension of public access defibrillation across Northern Ireland for the benefit of our people.

A range of stakeholders have a role in doing what they can in partnership with others to extend AED access. I believe however that it is imperative that the extension of public AED provision should be properly mapped on the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service (NIAS) Control System, so that use of an AED is supported by advice from an Ambulance Service controller in the knowledge that paramedic assistance has been requested and is on the way.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Communities what discussions he has had with his Executive colleagues to secure a cross-departmental commitment and strategy to end homelessness.

(AQW 2226/16-21)

Mr Givan: The cross-cutting nature of homelessness is recognised in the Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 which places a statutory duty on the Housing Executive to produce a homelessness strategy and a duty on a range of other public bodies to take this strategy into account in the exercise of their functions.

My Department chairs a Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) which meets biannually. HSSG includes representatives the Department of Health (including the Public Health Agency), Department of Justice (including the Probation Board), Department of Education, and the NI Housing Executive. It also includes representation from umbrella organisations representing homelessness and homelessness providers including Housing Rights Service, the Council for the Homeless (CHNI), Depaul Ireland, Simon Community Northern Ireland and the Welcome Organisation.

The current Homelessness Strategy comes to an end in April 2017. Work is already underway in the NI Housing Executive to develop a new Homelessness Strategy to be in place in April 2017. An Inter-agency Consultative Forum has been established by NIHE to ensure input from the Sector and from NI Departments throughout development.

Following the tragic deaths of 5 people in Belfast City Centre earlier this year a Ministerial Sub-Group on Rough Sleeping and Homelessness was established in March 2016 by the former Social Development Minister with the former Health and Justice Ministers. An action plan was developed, endorsed by NI Executive colleagues and implementation is underway.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Communities to outline his plans to address the issue of homelessness, including any targets and timelines.

(AQW 2228/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive is the lead agency for responding to homelessness in Northern Ireland and has certain statutory duties under the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to individuals or households who present to them as homeless or are threatened with homelessness. These duties extend from advice and assistance to a full accommodation duty depending on an individual's circumstances and vulnerability.

The Housing Executive's strategic approach to dealing with Homelessness is the current Homelessness Strategy 2012 – 17 which has an overall vision of eliminating long term homelessness and rough sleeping by 2020 and focuses on prevention and early intervention.

The Housing Executive has confirmed that an evaluation of the existing Homelessness Strategy has been commissioned. The feedback from the evaluation will inform the development of a new strategy due to be published in April next year.

In March 2016, following a number of street deaths in Belfast City Centre, the former Social Development Minister, established an inter-Ministerial group with the former Ministers of Health and Justice to tackle rough sleeping in Belfast. A subsequent action plan was developed and endorsed by previous NI Executive colleagues and implementation is underway. All actions are due for completion by March 2017.

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Communities to detail housing need in North Belfast, broken down by council ward area.

(AQW 2229/16-21)

Mr Givan: Housing need is identified by the number of applicants deemed to be in housing stress which is where applicants have 30 points or more on the housing waiting list.

The Housing Executive has advised that it does not hold projected housing need figures or waiting list figures for North Belfast council ward level. I have therefore provided the information you requested at Parliamentary Constituency and thereafter at the Housing Executives Common land lord area.

North Belfast Parliamentary Constituency

Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
Abbeyville	15
Alliance	7
Ardoyne	146
Ballysillan	52
Bawnmore/Old Mill Drive	59
Cambrai/Woodvale	50
Carlisle/New Lodge	203
Cavehill	201
Cliftondene	14
Cliftonville	275
Duncairn Gardens	20
Fairhill	14
Felden	146
Gainsborough	24
Glandore & Dunmore	13
Glenvarna/Glengormley	104
Grove Area	24
Hightown	12
Longlands	25
Lower Ligoniel/Glenbank	21
Lower Oldpark	18
M/S Flats - Carlisle	41
Mid Shankill	76
Mount Vernon Estate	7
Newington/Limestone	70
Oldpark	66
Queens Park/Queens Avenue	46
Rathcoole	223
Rathfern	16
Rosewood/Crumlin RDA	2
Ross House Flats/Mountvernon Flats	1
Rushpark	83
Shore Road	36
Skegoneill/Ashfield/Fortwilliam	39
Somerton Rd (Sheltered)	29
Sunningdale	8
Torrens	20
Tudor	6
Upper & Lower Duncairn	18

Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
Upper Ligoniel	87
Westland	5
Wheatfield	6
Whitewell/Lwr Whitewell Rd. Fairyknowe	108
Whitewell/White City	11
	2447

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Communities, in light of the latest United Nations criticism of housing inequality in North Belfast, what action he will take to address the issues contained in the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - Concluding observations on the Sixth periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2230/16-21)

Mr Givan: In reference to the Committee's observations, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) is the public body with responsibility for determining housing need, identifying where new housing should be located and allocating social housing on the basis of identified need. Over the past five years, almost 1,000 new social homes have been delivered in the North Belfast constituency, representing 12% of the total of new social homes in Northern Ireland and an investment by the NIHE of over £140m.

Looking to the future, my Department and the NIHE remain committed to the provision of new social housing in North Belfast – and indeed across Northern Ireland where housing need exists. The NIHE's current unmet need prospectus (January 2016) shows that North Belfast's unmet housing need places it third in Northern Ireland after unmet housing need in West and South/East Belfast.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Communities where the planned new centres for dealing with Social Fund applications will be sited.

(AQW 2243/16-21)

Mr Givan: Following the publication of the Professor Evason Report, my Department has developed a new Discretionary Support Service which will replace the discretionary aspects of Social Fund (Crisis Loans and Community Care Grants). The new Discretionary Support Service is planned to be introduced from 1st November.

The new Discretionary Support is unique to Northern Ireland and is aimed to assist people on low incomes (working and non working) who find themselves in a financial crisis situation which presents a significant risk to the health, safety or well-being of either the person making the application or their immediate family.

This new service will be delivered primarily through a telephony-based service located in the Antrim and Dungannon Jobs and Benefits office. A face to face service will also be available in local offices.

Regulated elements for Social Fund (Budgeting Loans, Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments, Winter Fuel and Cold Weather payments) will continue to be available and from the end of this year will be processed from a central location in Lisburn Jobs and Benefits office.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Communities (i) when the results of the second gambling prevalence survey will be published; (ii) what is the projected final cost of the survey; (iii) whether the survey is being conducted by the Department or is being tendered to a private company; (iv) if so, which company will be conducting the survey; and (v) whether the funding for the survey is being solely provided by his Department.

(AQW 2265/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department placed a tender in March to carry out a gambling prevalence survey, similar to that taken in 2010. The successful applicant was Perceptive Insight, which over the summer will interview 1000 individuals. Departmental statisticians will evaluate the raw data and produce a report in the Autumn. The cost of the survey is unlikely to exceed £50,000 and the Department is the sole funder.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail the residential need figures broken down by (i) constituency and (ii) the smallest geographical area collected by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

(AQW 2271/16-21)

Mr Givan: "Residential need" has been interpreted as being those applicants on the waiting list with 30 points or more (i.e. those in housing stress).

The information provided is at Parliamentary Constituency and thereafter at Common Landlord Area as this is the smallest geographical area collected by the Housing Executive.

The waiting list/Residential need figures as held at Parliamentary Constituency level and Common Landlord Area are provided in the table below.

Waiting List Figures – Applicants in Housing Stress* at 1/04/2016

***Awarded 30 or more points**

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
Belfast East	Albertbridge Rd.	48
	Ardcarn	8
	Ashfield	15
	Ballybeen	111
	Ballyhackamore	57
	Bloomfield/Ravenscroft	68
	Braniel	60
	Brooklands	22
	Castlereagh	47
	Cherryvalley	5
	Clarawood	20
	Coronation Park	1
	Downshire Park	3
	Dundela	17
	Edenvale	29
	Galway Drive/Mews	7
	Garnerville	13
	Inverary	18
	Knocknagoney	30
	Lower Beersbridge/The Mount	26
	Moatview Park	5
	Newtownards Road	130
	Orchard Park	1
	Rosewood Park	1
	Short Strand	55
	Summerhill	6
	Sunderland Road	2
	Sydenham/Sandbrook/Lisavon	92
Tullycarnet	35	
Vionville Rural	1	
Wandsworth	9	
Belfast East Total		942
Belfast East/South	Bridge End, Rotherdam Court	2
	Cregagh Castlereagh	98
	Willowfield/Upper Castlereagh Road	109
Belfast East/South Total		209
** NB: Some CLA's cross Parliamentary Constituencies		

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
Belfast North	Abbeyville	15
	Alliance	7
	Ardoyne	146
	Ballysillan	52
	Bawnmore/Old Mill Drive	59
	Cambrai/Woodvale	50
	Carlisle/New Lodge	203
	Cavehill	201
	Cliftondene	14
	Cliftonville	275
	Duncairn Gardens	20
	Fairhill	14
	Felden	146
	Gainsborough	24
	Glandore & Dunmore	13
	Glenvarna/Glengormley	104
	Grove Area	24
	Hightown	12
	Longlands	25
	Lower Ligoniel/Glenbank	21
	Lower Oldpark	18
	M/S Flats - Carlisle	41
	Mid Shankill	76
	Mount Vernon Estate	7
	Newington/Limestone	70
	Oldpark	66
	Queens Park/Queens Avenue	46
	Rathcoole	223
	Rathfern	16
	Rosewood/Crumlin RDA	2
	Ross House Flats/Mountvernon Flats	1
	Rushpark	83
	Shore Road	36
Skegoneill/Ashfield/Fortwilliam	39	
Somerton Rd (Sheltered)	29	
Sunningdale	8	
Torrens	20	
Tudor	6	
Upper & Lower Duncairn	18	
Upper Ligoniel	87	

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Westland	5
	Wheatfield	6
	Whitewell/Lower Whitewell Rd. Fairyknowe	108
	Whitewell/White City	11
Belfast North Total		2447
Belfast South	Annadale	40
	Belvoir	80
	Bests Hill	6
	Cromac	74
	Donegall Pass	53
	Donegall Road	102
	Finaghy	117
	Flush Park Belfast	24
	Lisburn Road	371
	Lower Ormeau	202
	Milltown/Shaws Bridge	4
	Newtownbreda Village	32
	Sandy Row	39
	Stranmillis	20
	Taughmonagh	19
	Upper Ormeau	212
	Woodstock/Ravenhill	221
Belfast South Total		1616
Belfast South/Strangford	Carryduff	58
Belfast South/Strangford Total		58
Belfast West	Agnes Street	3
	Andersonstown	1052
	Ardmoulin	3
	Areema	68
	Ballygomartin/West Circular	33
	Ballymurphy	39
	Beattie	7
	Beechmount	106
	Brown Square	2
	Cavendish Street	10
	Dermotthill	3
	Divis Complex	21
	Dover	3
	Falls Court/Clonard Cres	114
	Florence/Hopewell	25

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Glencairn	20
	Gransha/Downfine	2
	Grosvenor Road	179
	Hannahstown	22
	Highfield	17
	Lawnbrook	12
	Lower Suffolk	9
	Moyard	11
	New Barnsley	25
	RDA AGNES/CRUMLIN	1
	Rockmount	2
	Roden Street	15
	Springfield Park	6
	Springfield Road	83
	Springhill	30
	Springmartin	15
	Springvale	8
	St James	66
	Turf Lodge	68
	Twinbrook-Poleglass	562
	Upper Shankill	17
	Westrock	20
	Whiterock	49
Belfast West Total		2728
Belfast West/North	Ainsworth	15
	Carrick Hill/Unity Flats	19
	Twaddell/Upper Woodvale	33
Belfast West/North Total		67
Belfast West/South	Hamill St/John St	38
Belfast West/South Total		38
East Antrim	Abbey Glen	3
	Ballycarry	1
	Bleach Green	11
	Carnlough (Croft, Beachlands)	23
	Carrick Central	23
	Castlemara	11
	Cushendall	26
	Cushendun	6
	Davys Street	2
	Drumhoy/Salia/Ederny	12

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Dunloskin Central	14
	Eden	40
	Ferris Park	1
	Glenarm (Village, Glenview, Parkview, Munie)	4
	Glenfield	2
	Glenville	39
	Glynn	3
	Green Edge/Scotch Qrt/Mckeens Ave	3
	Greenisland	68
	Islandmagee (B'strudder, Ashvale, Mullaghboy, Bungalows)	3
	Jennings Drive/Monkstown	1
	Larne Town	45
	Linn Road, Craigy Hill & Antiville	21
	Lower Woodburn	35
	Magheramourne	1
	Monkstown	65
	Old Glenarm Road (Seacourt)	5
	Riverdale	2
	Sallagh Park	6
	Sunnylands	110
	Taylor's Avenue	4
	Upper Woodburn	6
	Victoria	48
	Waterfoot	5
	Whitehead	30
	Windmill Hill	53
East Antrim Total		732
East Londonderry	Aghanloo	6
	Ardgarvan	1
	Articlave	3
	Atlantic	2
	Ballykelly	16
	Ballymonie	4
	Ballyrashane	2
	Ballysally	63
	Bellarena	2
	Boveedy	1
	Brook Green	6
	Castlerock	15
	Castleroe	2

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Churchlands	19
	Circular Road	26
	Clarehill/Aghadowey	2
	Claudy	22
	Craigmore	2
	Curraghmore Park	2
	Dernaflaw	1
	Dromore	2
	Drumadraw	1
	Drumavalley	2
	Drumsum	1
	Dungiven	41
	Dunluce	1
	Edenmore	26
	Farrenlester	3
	Feeny	5
	Ferryquay Street	13
	Garvagh/Mettigan	6
	Glenkeen	2
	Glenmanus	1
	Greysteel/Gortgar	8
	Grove	1
	Harpers Hill	42
	Heights/Hazelbank	70
	Killowen	31
	Kilrea	24
	Limavady Area 1	40
	Limavady Area 2	12
	Limavady Area 3 (Dungiven Road)	4
	Limavady Area 4	17
	Limavady Rural Area	2
	Long Commons	1
	Macosquin	5
	Magherabuoy	1
	Millburn/Cherry Place	27
	Muldonagh	1
	Newmills Road	26
	Park	2
	Portballintrae	14
	Portrush	114

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Portstewart	91
	Society Street	3
	The Crescent/Windsor Ave/James St	1
	Windyhall/Tullans	3
East Londonderry Total		841
Fermanagh South Tyrone	Ackinduff	1
	Aghadrumsee	1
	Arney/Ballanaleck	3
	Augher	4
	Aughnacloy	12
	Ballinamallard	5
	Ballygawley	12
	Belcoo	3
	Belleek Fermanagh	5
	Benburb	3
	Brookeborough	4
	Bush	6
	Caledon	4
	Castlecaulfield	6
	Chanterhill/Cavanaleck	20
	Church Street	10
	Clogher	7
	Coleshill	43
	Coolhill	6
	Cornagrade	27
	Derrygonnelly	1
	Derrylin	7
	Drumawill/Drumgallon	20
	Drumclay	12
	Dungannon Town Centre	8
	Dungannon West	359
	Ederney	2
	Enniskillen Town Centre	40
	Enniskillen Town South	40
	Fivemiletown	6
	Florencecourt	1
	Garrison	4
	Gortmerron	14
	Granville	4
	Hillview/Kilmacormick	21

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Irvinestown	26
	Kesh	8
	Kinawley	2
	Lack	1
	Laghey	7
	Lisbellaw	7
	Lisnaskea	20
	Magheraveely	1
	Maguiresbridge	10
	Milltown Dugannon	16
	Moy	32
	Moygashel	13
	Newtownbutler	5
	Roslea	5
	Springfield/Letterbreen/Monea	3
	Tempo/Clabby	5
Fermanagh South Tyrone Total		882
Foyle	Ardmore	3
	Ballyarnett	2
	Ballymagroarty/Hazel Bank	181
	Ballynagard	15
	Belmont	20
	Bishops St/Anne Street	82
	Brandywell	16
	Brigade	42
	Carnhill/Galliagh	635
	Caw	44
	Clooney	38
	Cloughglass (The Glen)	55
	Coshquin	4
	Creggan Derry	326
	Currynerin	11
	Drumahoe	12
	Eglinton	47
	Elmwood	1
	Fountain Derry	4
	Fountain Hill	3
	Foyle Road/Orchard Row	25
	Gobnascale	119
	Hollymount Park	32

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Ivy Terrace/Maureen Ave	1
	Kilfennan	39
	Knockdara	18
	Lettershandoney	4
	Lisnagelvin	76
	Lower Creggan	43
	Maydown	1
	Meenan Park	37
	Melvin Court	16
	Newbuildings	13
	Nixons Corner	8
	Northland Rd/Academy Rd	55
	Rosemount	86
	Rosstowney	7
	Rossville	142
	Shantallow	192
	Strathfoyle	39
	Tullyally	14
	Waterside/Triangle	92
Foyle Total		2600
Lagan Valley	Aghalee	6
	Ashfield/Tullyhonan	1
	Ballinderry	4
	Ballymacoss	201
	Culcavey	10
	Dromara	7
	Drumbo	2
	Dunmurry Rural	2
	Greenwood	51
	Hilden	82
	Hill Hall	16
	Hill Street	9
	Hillsborough	37
	Kinallen	2
	Knockmore	65
	Lambeg	48
	Lisburn Rural	1
	Meghaberry	3
	Milltown Lisburn	11
	Moira	29

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Old Warren	75
	Porters Row	1
	Purdysburn	2
	Ravarnette	3
	Seymour Hill & Conway	82
	Stoneyford	4
	Tonagh/Manor/Longstone/Jubilee/Causeway End	134
	Town Area Dromore	43
	Warren	25
Lagan Valley Total		956
Mid Ulster	Ardboe/Moortown/Ballinderry	19
	Ballymaguigan/St. Treas	3
	Ballyronan	4
	Bellaghy	5
	Cappagh	3
	Carmean	1
	Castledawson	29
	Clady Magherafelt	3
	Coagh	2
	Coalisland	128
	Cookstown North	28
	Cookstown South	41
	Donaghmore	26
	Draperstown	21
	Gulladuff	3
	Innisrush	1
	Labourers Cottages	1
	Loup	1
	Maghera	27
	Magherafelt	128
	Moneymore	6
	Moneyneaney	1
	Mountjoy Dungannon	3
	Newmills	4
	Pomeroy	5
	Rock	1
	Stewartstown	3
	Swatragh	3
	Tamlaght	1
	Tobermore	2

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Tullyhogue	4
Mid Ulster Total		507
Newry & Armagh	Alexander	8
	Annaghmore	6
	Ardmore Drive	21
	Armagh Road Newry	141
	Ballinahore	1
	Banbrook/Railway Street	34
	Barrack Street/Barrack Hill/Gough Avenue	3
	Belleek Armagh	5
	Beresford Court	1
	Bessbrook	76
	Bridge Street	6
	Callan Street/Crescent	2
	Callanbridge Park	11
	Camlough	33
	Carnbane Gardens	24
	Carrivemaclone	12
	Charlemont	7
	Clady Armagh	2
	Courtney Mill/Boat Street Area	42
	Cregagh Armagh	11
	Creggan Newry	1
	Crossmaglen	50
	Culdee	30
	Culloville	14
	Cullyhanna	8
	Daisy Hill	111
	Dalton	7
	Derramore	18
	Druids Villas	1
	Drumarg	10
	Drumbreda	7
	Drumintee	2
	Dukes Grove	4
	Fearons Terrace, Fr Cullen Park	17
	Folly	9
	Forkhill	23
	Glenanne	2
	Hamiltonsbawn	1

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Jonesboro	7
	Keady	26
	Killen Newry	3
	Legar Hill Park	1
	Lisanally Gardens/Villas	3
	Longstone	3
	Lonsdale Gardens	2
	Loughgall	4
	Lurganare	5
	Markethill	15
	Meigh	22
	Middletown	10
	Mullacreevie	19
	Mullaghbawn	20
	Mullaghglass	5
	Newry Road	1
	Newtowncloghogue	16
	Newtownhamilton	19
	North Street	73
	Orangefield	5
	Poyntzpass	6
	Richill	18
	Rooneys Meadow	210
	Shandon	34
	Silverbridge	1
	Tandragee	11
	Tynan	1
	Victoria Park	4
	Whitecross	6
	Windmill	2
Newry & Armagh Total		1313
North Antrim	Adair/Demesne	155
	Ahoghill	52
	Armoy	8
	Ballee/Letter Creeve/Shanowen etc.	50
	Ballintoy	4
	Ballybogey	4
	Ballycastle	93
	Ballykeel 1	42
	Ballykeel 2	18

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Ballyvoy	2
	Balmoral Ave/Princes St	8
	Balnamore	9
	Bendooragh	6
	Broughshane	79
	Bushmills	13
	Carnany	6
	Clintyfinnan	1
	Clough	1
	Cloughmills	11
	Corkey	1
	Craigyarwarren	1
	Cullybackey	60
	Dervock	5
	Doury Rd	12
	Druckendult	1
	Duke Street	2
	Dunaghy	1
	Dunclug	33
	Dunloy	10
	Dunvale	24
	Eastermeade	8
	Fisherwick Crescent	5
	Galgorm	10
	Glarryford	2
	Glebeside	33
	Glenravel	12
	Gracehill	5
	Harryville	132
	Herbison Park	16
	Kells	27
	Killyrammer	2
	Loughgiel	5
	Margaret Avenue	3
	Millfield	42
	Moorsfield/Glenwherry	1
	Mosside	2
	Portglenone Ballymena	27
	Rasharkin	10
	Rathlin	2

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Rectory	71
	Seacon	2
	Straid	2
	Stranocum	4
	Taylorstown/Moorelands	1
	Townparks	40
	Trinity Drive	2
	Tullygarley/Riverdale	3
	Westgate	14
North Antrim Total		1195
North Down	Bangor Central	118
	Bangor, Kilcooley	175
	Bloomfield Rd/Balloo	390
	Churchill	12
	Clandeboyne Rd	14
	Conlig	22
	Crawfordsburn	11
	Donaghadee	90
	Donaghadee Rd	48
	Groomsport	48
	Hollywood/Redburn	75
	Loughview/White City	53
	Millisle	36
	Rural Area, Helen's Bay	9
	Skipperstone/Tughan Court, Bangor	27
	Spencer Street	53
	Strand	18
Whitehill	78	
Woodlands Hollywood	1	
North Down Total		1278
South Antrim	Ballyclare	118
	Ballyduff	66
	Ballynadolly	1
	Ballynure	2
	Crumlin	116
	Doagh/Kelburn Pk	8
	Dundrod	2
	Firfields/Dublin Road	56
	Glenavy	23
	Hyde Pk/Parkmount	14

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Menin Rd/Spring Farm	8
	Moylena Grove	7
	New Mossley	68
	Newpark/Ballycraigy	37
	Oakview/Roughfort	2
	Old Mossley	15
	Parkgate/Templepatrick	15
	Parkhall/Steeple	85
	Randalstown	73
	Rathenraw	9
	Springfarm Estate	28
	Stiles/Rathkyle/Rathglynn	50
	Toomebridge	10
	Townparks North	32
	Townparks South	14
South Antrim Total		859
South Down	Annalong	15
	Annsborough	4
	Ardglass/Ballyhornan/Dunsford	49
	Attical	1
	Ballykinlar/Tyrella	2
	Ballymartin	3
	Ballyward	2
	Barnmeen	1
	Burren	4
	Castlewellan/Drumaroad	90
	Crossgar/Annacloy	44
	Downpatrick	223
	Drumaness	15
	Dundrum/Seaforde/Clough	26
	Dunnaman	9
	Granite View	2
	Hilltown	19
	Katesbridge	1
	Kilclief/Strangford	11
	Kilcoo	2
	Kilkeel	71
	Killough	14
	Mayobridge	19
	Model Farm	2

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Newcastle	265
	Rathfriland	21
	Rostrevor	41
	Spa/Ballymacarn	1
	The Commons	10
	Warrenpoint	145
South Down Total		1112
Strangford	Ballydrain	2
	Ballygowan	23
	Ballyhalbert	4
	Ballynahinch/Dunmore	68
	Ballywalter	25
	Bowtown	35
	Carrowdore	11
	Cloughey	7
	Comber	130
	Glen	101
	Greyabbey	15
	Killinchy	6
	Killyleagh	42
	Kilmore/Loughinisland/Annadorn	2
	Kircubbin	19
	Lisbarnet	3
	Loughries	1
	Moneyrea	4
	Movilla	125
	Portaferry	29
	Portavogie	8
	Ryan Park	1
	Saintfield	57
	Scrabo	167
	Shrigley	7
	West Winds	79
Strangford Total		971
Upper Bann	Aghagallon	8
	Ardowen/Altmore	13
	Armagh Road Portadown	1
	Avenue Road/Queen Street	14
	Ballyoran	10
	Banbridge Rural Cottages	3

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Banbridge Town	166
	Brownstown (Old)	10
	Castle View, Gilford	2
	Churchill Park/Gardens	13
	Clonmeen	11
	Corcrair	13
	Derrytrasna/Derrymacash/Kinnego	14
	Dollingstown	4
	Donacloney	3
	Drumbeg North	5
	Drumbeg South	1
	Drumgor Heights	4
	Drummellan	3
	Edward Street/Shankill	24
	Enniskeen	10
	Garvaghy Park, Ballrock	25
	Gibson Hill/Bleary	4
	Greenview Gardens	1
	Hill Street/Ann St/Sloan St	46
	Junction Row	4
	Kernan Hill Road Portadown	1
	Killicomaine	45
	Laurencetown	1
	Lenaderg	1
	Locard Park, Tullylish	1
	Loughbrickland	7
	Lurgan Town Centre	52
	Lurgantarry	41
	Manor Park	19
	Maralin	4
	Meadowbrook	5
	Mourneview	30
	Moyraverty	2
	Obins Avenue/Drive	2
	Old Rectory Park	1
	Parkmore	4
	Parkside	2
	Portadown Rural Area	3
	Rectory Park/Brownstown West	5
	Redmanville	4

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Rosmoyle	1
	Scarva	1
	Seagoe Park	11
	Seapatrik Avenue	1
	Stamore Road	2
	Taghnevan	37
	Town Centre	31
	Union Street	5
	Waringstown	9
	West Street Area	1
	Woodlands Gilford	6
	Woodside	5
Upper Bann Total		752
West Tyrone	Ardstraw	1
	Artigarvan	7
	Ballycolman	57
	Ballymagorry	17
	Beragh	3
	Brookmount/Derry Road	22
	Carrickmore	2
	Castleberg	22
	Clady Strabane	5
	Clanabogan	1
	Culmore/O'Kane	6
	Donemana	2
	Douglas Bridge	3
	Dromore Omagh	5
	Drumquin	7
	Dublin Road	69
	Erganagh	3
	Fintona	6
	Fountain Strabane	18
	Gortin	3
	Greencastle	1
	Hospital Road	12
	Kelvin Road/Gallows Hill	26
	Killeter	1
	Lammy/Tamlaght	21
	Lisanelly Gortin Rd	25
	Magheramason	6

Parliamentary Constituency **	Common Landlord Area (CLA)	Total
	Mullaghmore	21
	Newhouse	25
	Newtown	67
	Newtownstewart	12
	Omagh Cottages	1
	Plumbridge	1
	Sion Mills	33
	Sion Mills/Glebe	7
	Spamount	1
	Strathroy	22
	Trillick	1
West Tyrone Total		542
Grand Total		22,645

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of times that private contractors were assessed as failing in their social clause contractual obligations and; (ii) the number of times that breach of contract proceedings were initiated for this reason during the 2015-16 financial year.

(AQW 2272/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities have no instances of private contractors assessed as failing social clause contractual obligations in 2015/16.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the number of procurement contracts entered into; (ii) the number of contracts that have social clauses which ring-fenced job and apprenticeship opportunities for the long-term unemployed; and (iii) the total value of procurement expenditure by the public authorities currently under his remit.

(AQW 2273/16-21)

Mr Givan: The information requested is included on the table below and relates to contracts entered into since the establishment of the Department for Communities and associated Arms Length Bodies to date (i.e. 9 May 2016 – 6 July 2016).

Number of DfC Contracts	Number of Contracts – Inclusive of Social Clauses with ring fenced job and apprenticeship opportunities	Total value of Procurement Expenditure
149	6	£11,262,497

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline any discussions between his Department and the Equality Commission or Human Rights Commission on the compatibility of Part 4 of the the Welfare Supplementary Payment (Loss of Disability Living Allowance) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 with Section 75; and for his assessment of Part 4 and its compliance with Section 75.

(AQW 2290/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department was tasked by the Executive in January 2016 to take forward the recommendations in the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group report. As part of that process the views of the Equality Commission were sought with regard to the Departments equality obligations with the implementation of the various mitigation measures. The Department followed the advice provided and to date has published on the Department's website equality screenings on Benefit Cap, ESA Time Limiting and Welfare Supplementary Payments (Loss of Disability Premiums; Loss of Carers Allowance: Loss of Disability Living Allowance) Policy. There have been no specific discussions with the Human Rights Commission on the compatibility of the Welfare Supplementary Payment Regulations with human rights legislation.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities what discussions he has held with victims organisations on the implications of his Department's move to Personal Independence Payment from Disability Living Allowance, and the resultant payments to terrorists injured by their own hand.

(AQW 2313/16-21)

Mr Givan: Since 2012 there has been ongoing discussion with the Commissioner(s) for Victims and Survivors and her office, the Victims and Survivors Service and also with some members of the Victims Forum to discuss the introduction of Personal Independence Payment. There are many victims and survivors who are existing Disability Living Allowance recipients and it is expected that most will be successful in migrating to Personal Independence Payment. The discussions which my officials have been undertaking have been focussed on how we can ensure that victims and survivors are fully supported throughout the Personal Independence Payment assessment process to avoid the trauma victims and survivors can experience when having to retell their story.

In addition, a specific forum for local disability groups and the advice sector comprising of over 60 groups was also established to discuss Personal Independence Payment. Prior to the introduction of Personal Independence Payment on 20 June 2016, 16 meetings of this forum were held, at which my officials discussed not only the implementation plans for Personal Independence Payment but also how my Department planned to take forward the recommendations from the welfare reform mitigations working group report led by Professor Evason. In recent months my officials also met with the Commissioner for Victims and Survivors to advise that under the Welfare Supplementary Payment (Loss of DLA) Regulations the Department may in certain instances consult with the Commission for Victims and Survivors.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Communities what impact the reform of local government and the convergence of rates had on the average rates bill, for each council area.

(AQW 2315/16-21)

Mr Givan: Local Government Reform modernised and increased the functions of district councils in Northern Ireland. As part of the reform programme, the Executive committed £30 million to alleviate the impact on those ratepayers who would have experienced a sudden increase in their rates as a direct result of the formation of the 11 new councils.

Using funding increments of 80%, 60%, 40% and 20%, over the four financial years covering 2015/16 – 2018/19, the scheme will essentially protect those whose rate bills may have experienced a significant increase as a result of merging with councils where rates were at a higher level.

Prior to the reform of local government, differences existed in the level of district rates charged by district councils. The rates convergence scheme addresses only the increase in rate bills which is a direct result of the creation of the 11 new councils. Therefore, it is not possible to meaningfully compare the district rates from the predecessor 26 councils with the new 11 councils.

The setting of district rates is a matter for councils and takes into account expenditure levels projected for the forthcoming year.

Department of Education

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education for his Department's assessment of the number of pupils that are disadvantaged in terms of course work, revision and homework due to poor broadband coverage at home and in school; and whether he will work with his Executive colleagues to address this deficit.

(AQW 1731/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): Under the current Education Network (EN) contract, which delivers the C2k ICT Managed Service, all grant-aided schools have been provided with increased bandwidth thus ensuring that pupils and teachers have access to sufficient broadband capability while they are on school premises regardless of geographical location.

The delivery and quality of broadband coverage to domestic properties is a matter for the Department of the Economy.

Department for the Economy

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to detail his Department's capital investment plan for Upper Bann over the next 5 years; and the location and value of each capital investment.

(AQW 227/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): The table below details my department's current capital investment plan for Upper Bann over the next 5 years. In cases where it has not been possible to disaggregate the expenditure to the Upper Bann constituency area, the Northern Ireland wide value has been quoted.

Proposed Project	Project Location	Project Value	Project year(s)
Gas to the West	Upgrading of an existing gas pressure reduction station in Portadown area and provision of a new gas transmission pipeline from Portadown to Dungannon	Works within the Upper Bann Constituency are estimated at circa £17.8m and is to be grant aided at a rate of 35%, so Departmental funded capital expenditure of circa £6.2m is anticipated.	2017/18 subject to planning and other approvals.

Proposed Project	Project Location	Project Value	Project year(s)
Superfast Roll-out Programme	Northern Ireland wide	£14.7m (it is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on a constituency basis due to the nature of the project).	2016/17 and 2017/18
NI Broadband Improvement Project –Basic Broadband Scheme	Northern Ireland wide	£1.56m (it is not possible to disaggregate expenditure on a constituency basis due to the nature of the project).	2016/17 and 2017/18
Southern Regional College – Banbridge Campus	Banbridge	£12.6m	2016/17 £197k 2017/18 £4m 2018/19 £8m 2019/20 £350k
Southern Regional College - Craigavon Campus	South Lakes, Craigavon	£47m	2016/17 £670k 2017/18 £13.1m 2018/19 £25.8m 2019/20 £7.4m
Further Education Minor Works	Across Southern Regional College (SRC) Estate including campuses at Banbridge, Lurgan and Portadown	SRC has been allocated a total of £834k in 2016/17 to cover minor capital works across all campuses. It is up to the College to prioritise expenditure within this overall budget. Allocations are made on an annual basis.	2016/17 £834k

Significant funding is required for what is termed minor works. This is a catch-all term for all capital expenditure not classified as a major capital project. This includes expenditure on vehicles, specialist equipment, IT infrastructure and works such as the introduction of energy efficiency schemes, building extensions and adjustments required to meet disability and other legislative requirements.

The project values provided are based on the costs currently profiled, however the actual budget allocation has been approved for capital expenditure for the 2016/17 financial year only. The provision of capital funding in respect of the period 2017/18 to 2020/21 has not yet been agreed by the Executive.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy if any guidance has been offered to further and higher education colleges on how to manage cuts to their budget.

(AQW 985/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland universities, university colleges and further education colleges are responsible for their own policies and procedures, including those relating to the management of their budgets, the determination of course provision and staffing. They employ qualified professional staff, experienced in the management of budgets in their sector. My Department has not therefore issued any guidance on managing budget changes for 2016/17. Officials do meet with relevant staff as necessary to discuss any areas of specific concern.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy to detail all (i) completed; (ii) in progress; and (iii) future capital projects funded through his Department in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 1431/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The tables below detail my Department's capital projects completed in the last ten years, those in progress and those planned in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

For some projects, where it has not been possible to break down the costs by year or by area, the overall project cost has been included.

Table 1: Completed Capital Projects

Name of Completed Project	Project Location	Project Value	Project year(s): (2006/07 – 2015/16)
PEACE II: Fivemiletown	Clabby, Co Fermanagh	£442k	2008/09
PEACE II: Oona Valley	Eglisli, Dungannon	£184k	2008/09
PEACE II: South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)	Ballysaggart Business Park, Dungannon	£113k	2008/09
		£14k	2009/10
INTERREG IVa: Workspace at Enniskillen Airport	Enniskillen	£1m	2010/11
INTERREG IVa: Border Uplands	Fermanagh	£1.9m	2011/12
INTERREG IVa: Centre for Renewable Energy & Sustainable Technologies (CREST)	South West College, Enniskillen	£1.92m	2012/13
South West College – Dungannon campus (PPP contract)	Dungannon	£15m	2006/07 (Commenced in 2003/04)
South West College – Skills Centre, Enniskillen	Enniskillen	£11m	2007/08 - 2009/10
Remote Broadband Services (Satellite)	*All NI	£1.1m	2008/09 – 2012/13
Direct International Connectivity (Project Kelvin)	*All NI	£15.4m	2008/09 – 2010/11
Logon-ni (Broadband Stimulation)	*All NI	£3.7m	2008/09 – 2013/14
Dusting trial	A4 Tamlaght	£58k	2008/09 - 2009/10
Next Generation Broadband Project	*All NI	£17.1m	2009/10 – 2012/13
NI Broadband Fund (8 projects)	*All NI	£702k	2009/10 – 2015/16
Local Broadband Access Project (First Generation)	*All NI	£2.8m	2006/07 - 2009/10
Wi-fi Trial	Enniskillen	£13k	2009/10

* All NI – it is not possible to provide breakdown for Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Table 2: Capital Projects currently underway:

Name of Project currently in progress	Project Location	Project Value	Project year(s)
South West College (Erne campus)	Enniskillen	£24m	2015/16, 2016/17. (Due to be completed in 2019/20)
NI Broadband Improvement Project	*All NI	£12.8m	2013/14 – 2015/16
Superfast Rollout Project	*All NI	£7.4m	2015/16 – 2016/17

* All NI – it is not possible to provide breakdown for Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Table 3: Future Capital Projects:

Name of Future Project	Project Location	Project Value	Project year(s)
Gas to the West project (DfE will administer NI Executive grant funding at 35% of eligible capital costs)	Project involves provision of new gas networks to main towns in the West including to Enniskillen and Derrylin in Co. Fermanagh. (other towns include Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Strabane, and Omagh)	Part funding of the high pressure gas pipeline will involve anticipated grant expenditure in Fermanagh and South Tyrone of around £20.8m*	Construction works to provide main higher pressure gas pipelines in the West is anticipated to commence in 2017, subject to obtaining planning and other consents, with local gas distribution networks to be provided over subsequent years.

- * This relates to NI Executive part funding towards the planned high pressure gas pipeline to be laid from the constituency boundary near Dungannon towards Enniskillen. This pipeline will also serve to take gas to other towns in the West such as Omagh, Cookstown, Coalisland, and Magherafelt, and Derrylin

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his proposals for compensating residents of Conars Court, Derry following discovery that the building was “immediately dangerous” as a result of faulty fittings and the failure of safety regulators to identify this deficiency at an earlier stage.

(AQW 1847/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I can confirm that the building at Conars Court was not declared ‘immediately dangerous’. It was components of the gas installation pipework and the provision for ventilation of the protected shafts that the pipework had been installed in, that were identified as ‘at risk’. This was discovered whilst safety checks were being carried out by a gas service company.

The ‘at risk’ classification means that the installation is potentially dangerous, i.e. one or more faults exist and may in the future constitute a danger to life or property. Hence the gas supply was disconnected. This was a sensible course of action.

I would further confirm that there is no legal requirement for HSENI to be notified or to approve of the construction or installation of new gas systems. The gas installation in question had been installed some 8 years previously and was brought to the attention of HSENI by a sub contractor who was seeking advice on industry standards with relation to corrective work required.

Whilst being sympathetic to the situation that the residents of Conars Court are in, I have to advise that the question of compensation is a civil matter.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the possibility that the safety problems encountered at Conars Court, Derry are replicated in residential buildings elsewhere; and what steps does he propose to take to establish the facts of the matter.

(AQW 1848/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Whilst the discovery of this installation is concerning, it should not be taken as an overall example of gas installation works carried out in Northern Ireland, which to date has a good record for safety. However HSENI will, if informed, of such defective installations, do all that is possible within its powers to seek rectification of such defects.

This will include, where possible, investigating and taking appropriate action against the original developers and/or installers to ensure future compliance. HSENI also makes efforts to bring any such poor practice to the attention of industry through gas safety forums, installer presentations and information exchange with other stake holders such as Gas Safe Register, Gas Suppliers, Local Authority Building Control Departments and Trade Associations.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy, in light of the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland characterising the Conars Court flats complex, Derry as immediately dangerous, whether he will launch an inquiry into when and by which agency Conars Court was certified as fit for habitation.

(AQW 1923/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: HSENI has advised it did not characterise the Conars Court as ‘immediately dangerous’. Components of the gas installation pipework and the provision for ventilation of the protected shafts that the pipework had been installed in, were identified as ‘at risk’ by a gas service company whilst carrying out safety checks.

The ‘at risk’ classification means that the installation is potentially dangerous, i.e. one or more faults exist and may in the future constitute a danger to life or property. Hence the gas supply was disconnected. This was a sensible course of action.

In relation to your request for an inquiry, I have to advise that issues of fitness for habitation of buildings are not within the remit of HSENI or for the Department for the Economy.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the percentage of competitive grant research income at higher education institutions from European Union sources from 2007 to 2016.

(AQW 1985/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not hold this information.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy why there are no three phase courses for electrical engineering apprentices being offered in further education colleges.

(AQW 2083/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Three phase electrical engineering is not a standalone course provided by colleges, it is offered as part of the framework in several engineering areas, such as that of the Level 3 Electro Technical Apprenticeship, which supports the development of electrical installation apprentices. In addition colleges also offer a range of pathways at level 2 and 3 for engineering apprentices - the content of these courses includes elements of electrical training which are primarily focused on single phase electricity incorporating elements of three phase wiring systems.

In providing all training and assessment the colleges are guided by the qualification content and National Occupational Standards as set by the awarding bodies in consultation with the relevant sector skills council.

If a company requires specific training requirements the business services team from colleges and their professional and technical experts will meet with the company to discuss their requirements. This can then develop into a training course to meet their needs and also determine if it is viable for the college to provide the course.

For existing employers, as the industry is currently moving towards electrical motors, colleges have delivered a number of short accredited conversion courses to support the up skilling of mechanical engineers, the latest course being provided for McCloskey International through Skills Focus.

The hazards of working with 3 phase electricity are widely known therefore any apprenticeship supporting the development of these skills needs to be rigorous, therefore the 3 / 4 year electrical installation apprenticeship is where the bulk of 3 phase work is undertaken.

The colleges are the largest providers of professional and technical training in Northern Ireland, and they make a significant high quality contribution to addressing the current and future skills needs of local and regional business. All of the colleges have a strong engagement with industry, offering training and learning development through further and higher education with employers and their employees.

Whilst my Department sets the strategic direction for the further education sector, each college is responsible for its own curriculum offer, including those areas which include the occupational area of electrical engineering and 3 phase electrical distribution and control.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy why training for electrical engineering apprenticeships is a two year course. (AQW 2084/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The ApprenticeshipsNI programme aims to provide participants with the opportunity to take part in a Level 2/Level 3 apprenticeship where participants work towards achieving an industry-approved Level 2/Level 3 apprenticeship framework.

Apprenticeships usually take between two to four years to complete and each framework for the specific occupational area is agreed with the relevant Sector Skills Council or industry-led representative body and comprises of directed training, related knowledge, appropriate Essential Skills, and structured workplace training.

My Department's commitment to an apprentice/employer is the target framework identified in the Personal Training Plan, which after the initial assessment period cannot be altered until achievement of the target framework, with the exception of a Revised Framework.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for the Economy what plans are in place to promote the tourist and leisure industry on the North Coast. (AQW 2189/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Both Tourism NI and Tourism Ireland promote the North Coast as a key tourism destination in Northern Ireland. Campaigns include TV, radio, press, outdoor promotions and digital marketing coverage. In addition, all activity is underpinned by extensive PR and media relations activity.

The Causeway Coastal Route has proven very popular with visitors from all markets and both tourism organisations continue to market it to attract new and repeat visitors.

The promotion of the tourism product and experiences on the Causeway Coastal Route are highlighted through other promotional materials including brochures, and the organisations' consumer websites. In addition, Tourism NI works with Tourism Ireland to host international media and the Causeway Coastal Route is prominently featured in many itineraries.

Screen tourism is a growing trend and building on Tourism Ireland's unique partnership with HBO in previous years, a third Game of Thrones campaign, aimed at capitalising on the global success of the hit TV series and highlighting its connections with Northern Ireland, was rolled out recently, highlighting filming locations such as Ballintoy Harbour, Murlough Bay and The Dark Hedges. Tourism NI rolled out elements of the campaign in Northern Ireland and Rol.

Tourism Ireland continues to place a major focus on iconic experiences and the Giant's Causeway, the Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge and the Dark Hedges all feature in Tourism Ireland's new film – Ten amazing places in Northern Ireland – which is currently being promoted via its social media platforms, Facebook (3.6 million fans), Twitter (346,000 followers) and YouTube.

Tourism NI is currently supporting Tourism Ireland in a six figure promotional campaign with Trip Advisor focusing on promotional activity along the Causeway Coastal Route. This will involve marketing and selling the area's visitor assets and presenting offers and experiences from the local tourism industry. To date 50 offers have been submitted by a number of businesses for the campaign.

Tourism Northern Ireland has facilitated the establishment of 2 Pilot Tourism Cluster Business Networks along the Causeway Coastal Route designed to encourage tourism businesses to work collaboratively together to deliver an improved experience for visitors in each of their areas. The Glens of Antrim cluster involves 27 businesses from the area. There are plans in place to develop and establish pilot cluster networks in the Causeway & Binevenagh areas.

Mr McKay asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of how immigration from other parts of the European Union has benefitted the local economy.

(AQW 2245/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: For many years migration has been a feature of our economy reflecting an increasingly globalised market for workers and sought after skills. Northern Ireland has accessed that wider pool of labour to fill jobs and help us, and our businesses, address skills shortages that can, and do, arise from time to time. Our universities and FE colleges have also been successful in attracting the workers of tomorrow to come to study in Northern Ireland with the potential for talent to be retained within the local economy once their studies are completed.

Department of Finance

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Finance whether there are any plans for a further Voluntary Exit Scheme; and if so, when it will begin.

(AQW 1959/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): There are no plans to introduce a further Voluntary Exit Scheme specific to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). This was confirmed by the Head of the Civil Service in a note to all NICS staff on 6 January 2016.

Department of Health

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) why the decision was made to move Southern Health and Social Care Trust employees from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay; and (ii) the level of consultation that took place between workers, unions and the Trust.

(AQW 934/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) why the decision was taken to move employees in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust who were paid on a weekly/fortnightly basis to a monthly basis from September 2016; and (ii) if the Southern Health and Social Care Trust intends to hold negotiations with staff and trade unions regarding this decision.

(AQW 1205/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health for a breakdown of planned spending of the £72 million received by her Department in the June Monitoring Round.

(AQW 1246/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Whilst I welcome the additional revenue funding of £67m received in the June Monitoring round, this does not cover all of the pressures facing health and social care in 2016/17. I have therefore had to make difficult decisions in light of a range of competing priorities. Notwithstanding this, the June Monitoring funding is being directed at helping vulnerable people in line with my priorities.

I have decided that the additional revenue resources will help address a range of existing front line pressures right across the health and social care sector, including unscheduled care, improving patient flow through our hospitals, providing children's and mental health/learning disability services and additional social care provision to help meet increasing demands. I am also finalising a range of investments across a number of new service developments, including children's services, mental health/learning disability services, public health and primary care.

The additional capital funding of £5m will support the ICT capital investment programme, including projects such as providing system support for the hearing screening programme for new born babies and the Ambulance Service 999 response system

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail where the extra £72 million allocated to her Department in the June Monitoring Round will be spent.

(AQW 1252/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Whilst I welcome the additional revenue funding of £67m received in the June Monitoring round, this does not cover all of the pressures facing health and social care in 2016/17. I have therefore had to make difficult decisions in light of a range of competing priorities. Notwithstanding this, the June Monitoring funding is being directed at helping vulnerable people in line with my priorities.

I have decided that the additional revenue resources will help address a range of existing front line pressures right across the health and social care sector, including unscheduled care, improving patient flow through our hospitals, providing children's and mental health/learning disability services and additional social care provision to help meet increasing demands. I am also finalising a range of investments across a number of new service developments, including children's services, mental health/learning disability services, public health and primary care. I will be making announcements on these over the coming weeks.

The additional capital funding of £5m will support the ICT capital investment programme, including projects such as providing system support for the hearing screening programme for new born babies and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service 999 response system

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 839/16-21, to detail the number of staff affected in each division of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

(AQW 1377/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 839/16-21, whether the relevant Health and Social Care Trusts have considered keeping existing payment arrangements for current staff unchanged and commencing monthly payments for new employees.

(AQW 1378/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 839/16-21, to list the consultations undertaken with the staff that would be affected prior to employment contracts being changed.

(AQW 1519/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 839/16-21, whether it is her intention that the proposed changes to monthly payments result in all staff working for each Health and Social Care Trust being paid monthly; and if not, how many staff will receive their wages (i) weekly; and (ii) fortnightly after September 2016.

(AQW 1520/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health whether her Department will make Vimizim available on the National Health Service following approval by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence.

(AQW 1998/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I announced on 20 July that my Department will introduce NICE-approved Highly Specialised Technologies – including Vimizim – to eligible patients in the north of Ireland.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health to outline what preparatory work is being undertaken in anticipation of NICE guidance being published on Duchenne muscular dystrophy treatment, Translarna, to ensure that it is made available as soon as possible. (AQW 2076/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I announced on 20 July that my Department will introduce NICE-approved Highly Specialised Technologies – including Translarna – to eligible patients in the north of Ireland.

My officials are taking the necessary steps to ensure that translarna is available as soon as possible.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to consider the implementation of measures to improve road safety in the vicinity of Groarty Primary School, Coshquin Road, Derry. (AQW 112/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): Given the interest in this matter, I have asked officials to carry out an assessment of the existing road conditions along the Coshquin Road, Derry. The assessment will include an examination of the impact that traffic has on pedestrians using the Coshquin Road including road safety issues relating to access to Groarty Integrated Primary School.

I will write to you again after I have considered the issues arising out of this assessment.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much was spent by the Department for Regional Development to rebuild and reinstate roads that were eroded, damaged or destroyed by coastal erosion and/or tidal surges; each year for the past 10 years (from April 2005 to the end of March 2016), broken down per county. (AQW 229/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not record expenditure at the specific level of detail in order to respond in the format requested.

The member may, however, be interested to know that extensive coastal erosion work has been undertaken by the former Department for Regional Development over the past five years comprising of sea defence strengthening, rock armouring, rock face netting, slope stabilisation and repairs to sea walls in County Down and along the A2 Coast Road in County Antrim. The estimated expenditure arising from the engineering works that were carried out over the past five years is illustrated below for both Down and Antrim.

- 2011 \ 2012 - £287,000
- 2012 \ 2013 - £1,052,000
- 2013 \ 2014 - £2,026,000
- 2014 \ 2015 - £764,500
- 2015 \ 2016 - £292,000

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure what immediate plans Transport NI has to alleviate the traffic congestion on Edward Street, Downpatrick; and when these measures will be implemented. (AQW 294/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has recently completed a review of the numerous transport studies carried out over the years for Downpatrick Town Centre. This review has identified a number of short, medium and long term proposals for the town.

A proposal for a one way traffic system for Edward Street, St Dillons Avenue and John Street was identified as a scheme for delivery within the 1-3 year period to address the traffic issues in the area. However, during the consultation process, which was undertaken as part of the review, a significant number of objections were received from residents and these now require careful consideration before any scheme can be taken forward.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) when action will be taken in regards to grass cutting in Mid Ulster; and (ii) why there is a difference made by the section offices in relation to grass cutting between the District Electoral Areas. (AQW 1245/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following June monitoring an additional £5m has been allocated to the Department for routine road maintenance activities. This will allow TransportNI to enhance the level of services which it can provide, including grass cutting. The first cut is already under way in Mid Ulster and the additional funding will allow grass to be cut twice across all areas during 2016/17.

As I am sure you will appreciate, it is not feasible to have operational resources working on grass cutting in all District Electoral Areas at the same time. Whilst, at any given time, this may give an appearance of a different approach across various areas, I can assure you that the overall policy and approach is the same across all areas.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has plans for new bus routes in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 2167/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As part of the Service Agreement in place between my Department and Translink, Translink continuously assesses the performance of their services and where there is sustainable demand will establish new bus routes or modify existing services.

From 1 July 2016, Translink has modified its offering on key commuter services from Enniskillen and Dungannon to Belfast. To complement these improvements and deliver its aim to attract more passengers Translink has introduced promotional fares for travellers on these services.

In addition, Translink has recently introduced new services from Enniskillen to Bundoran that serve Ballinamallard, Irvinestown, Kesh and Pettigo en route. A further additional service has been started that provides a Saturday service from Cavan to Enniskillen.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 5 August 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the persons or bodies to whom their Department have provided hospitality; and (ii) the cost of providing this hospitality in each of the last twelve months.
(AQW 935/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Details of the persons or bodies to whom hospitality has been provided are not held centrally on the Department's financial accounting system.

The following table sets out the costs incurred by the Department in respect of hospitality during the twelve months ended 31 May 2016. Information has been provided separately for the three overseas offices (Office of the Northern Ireland Bureau in Brussels, Northern Ireland Bureau Washington and Northern Ireland Bureau China) as hospitality for these offices includes promoting Northern Ireland's capabilities internationally and developing mutually beneficial relationships with targeted countries, regions and international organisations to enhance our credibility and realise tangible benefits for our community.

Month	Total Cost for OFMDFM (£)	Costs for Overseas Offices (£)	Cost excluding Overseas Offices (£)
June 2015	15,329	7,190	8,139
July 2015	13,934	12,955	979
August 2015	4,776	4,279	497
September 2015	9,583	4,787	4,796
October 2015	7,598	4,880	2,718
November 2015	10,375	5,409	4,966
December 2015	11,944	9,146	2,798
January 2016	15,380	14,117	1,263
February 2016	13,119	6,961	6,158
March 2016	29,810	24,261	5,548
April 2016	6,048	3,173	2,875
May 2016	6,170	4,052	2,118
Total	144,066	101,211	42,855

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the eight external members of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture & Tradition have been appointed; and when the public will be made aware of these appointments.
(AQW 940/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The eight external members of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture & Tradition have been appointed. The Commission was launched by the First Minister and deputy First Minister on 20 June 2016.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the group established to bring forward proposals for an inquiry into cases of abuse not in the competence of the Hart Inquiry.
(AQO 13/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The remit of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse is to examine if there were systemic failings by the state or institutions in their duties towards children under 18 in their residential care between 1922 and 1995.

We are sensitive to the views of those who have suffered abuse who fall outside the scope of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry and are mindful of the equally destructive impact it has had on many people.

Scoping exercises and options papers were undertaken in relation to residents aged 18 or over of Mother and Baby Homes/Magdalene Asylums (Laundries), and in relation to non-institutional victims of clerical child abuse, which were put to the Executive Committee during the previous mandate for a decision on the way forward.

On 10 February 2016 the Executive agreed to establish an inter-departmental working group led by DHSSPS (now the Department of Health) to review the evidence pertaining to Mother and Baby Homes/Magdalene Asylums (Laundries) with the objective of making recommendations to the Executive within 6 months.

Officials in the Executive Office are working collaboratively with officials in the Department of Health on the outworkings of the Executive's decision regarding non-institutional clerical child abuse.

Mr Attwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to confirm if their Department has held any meetings with churches, religious orders or other providers that were in control of or otherwise responsible for the institutions which are subject to the Hart Inquiry, specifically in relation to the proposal for financial redress if recommended by the Hart Inquiry. **(AQW 1408/16-21)**

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Although the Inquiry Chairman publicly stated in his announcement on 4 November 2015 that he will recommend that there should be a scheme to award financial compensation to those children who suffered abuse in children's homes and other institutions here between 1922 and 1995, he also stated that the Inquiry has more work to do on the matter.

The Inquiry has yet to draw its conclusions from the evidence before it or to make recommendations, as required by its terms of reference. To date, therefore, no meetings have been held between the Executive Office and those responsible for the institutions as defined in the Inquiry's terms of reference.

The Historical Abuse Inquiry will be making its recommendations, including a fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, in its report to the Executive in January 2017.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister when the Omagh community will be asked to play its part in hosting Syrian refugees; and to outline the preparatory inter-departmental work which needs to be completed locally for such a development. **(AQW 1501/16-21)**

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are committed to receiving further groups of refugees on a phased basis and officials are in ongoing discussions with the Home Office in Westminster to this end.

All council areas are being considered as potential resettlement locations while maintaining a focus on identifying areas that can best meet the needs of refugees.

Through the Department for Communities Operational Group, we continue to engage both interdepartmentally and with councils to ensure that we have the appropriate arrangements in place, including accommodation, health services and education that can meet the needs of refugees. Although the Executive is taking the lead, councils have the essential role of preparing communities for new arrivals and ensuring they are welcomed with dignity and respect.

Mr McGrath asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to list the volunteer and community groups that received funding from their Department, or legacy Department, in each of the last three years, including the amount given each year. **(AQW 1646/16-21)**

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: A list of the Voluntary and Community groups which have received funding from the Department, and the amounts they received in each of the last three years have been placed in the Assembly Library.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the contingency plan that the Executive had prepared for the event of the United Kingdom voting to leave the European Union. **(AQW 1831/16-21)**

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The priority of the Executive is to ensure our interests are protected.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can. In addition, the Chief Executive of Invest NI has established a liaison group with our business community.

For our part, we are agreed that our specific circumstances must be accounted for in any new arrangements that are developed.

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the work to date on the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme.

(AQO 128/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Three groups of refugees have arrived so far, and been resettled in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and the Armagh/Banbridge/Craigavon area.

The initial reception and settlement of the refugees has proceeded very smoothly, and the refugees have been touched and delighted by the warmth of the welcome they have received since their arrival here.

We are committed to receiving further groups of refugees on a phased basis and officials are in ongoing discussion with the Home Office in Westminster to this end.

Mr McAleer asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition.

(AQO 132/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The members of the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture & Tradition have now been appointed. They are as follows:

Joint Chairs, Dr Dominic Bryan and Mr Neville Armstrong

Members

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| ■ Mr Doug Beattie MLA MC | ■ Dr David Thomas Hume MBE | ■ Mr David Anthony Robinson |
| ■ Mr Ian Crozier | ■ Mr Donncha Mac Niallais | ■ Mr Mukesh Sharma MBE |
| ■ Mr Richard Good | ■ Mr Nelson McCausland MLA | ■ Mr Carl Whyte |
| ■ Mr Tom Hartley | ■ Mr Ian McCrea | |
| ■ Prof Thomas William Hennessey | ■ Dr Katy Radford MBE | |

Membership of the Commission was announced on Monday 20th June 2016 and the first meeting of the Commission was held on 6 July 2016.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the projects and their value committed under the Social Investment Fund, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 1873/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund (SIF) has made significant progress over the last year and to date funding has been committed to 63 projects worth over £71million. A table has been placed in the Assembly Library that provides the details of these projects.

As you will appreciate, costs in relation to capital projects may change as they progress through detailed design and construction.

Mr Chambers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any discussions they have had with HM Government regarding the cost of reducing levels of corporation tax.

(AQW 2048/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Department of Finance has lead responsibility for Corporation Tax on behalf of the Executive. The Department of Finance has been in regular contact with the Government and much work has already been undertaken to understand and estimate the costs and revenues associated with a devolved Corporation Tax regime.

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline what work they propose to undertake over July and August 2016 to reassure European Union migrants working locally that they are secure and free to remain here as long as they wish.

(AQW 2202/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We assure people from European Union countries and other migrants living here, that they are welcome and valued. We remain committed to the vision expressed in the Racial Equality Strategy of a society which is strengthened by its ethnic diversity, free from racism, and where we can share a common sense of belonging. We will continue to progress the implementation of the Strategy over the coming months.

It is our view that there is absolutely no place for racism or intolerance in any of its manifestations. We unequivocally condemn all racist attacks and strongly encourage all victims to report any racist incident, however minor.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the total cost of the Bovine TB Eradication Programme over each of the last five years.

(AQW 576/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): The total cost of the Bovine TB Eradication Programme over each of the last five years was:

Financial year	Total cost
2014/15	£28,669,650
2013/14	£26,918,006
2012/13	£30,884,976
2011/12	£26,658,721
2010/11	£22,096,909

Final figures for the 2015/16 financial year are not yet available.

Since 2010 DAERA's Bovine TB Eradication Programme has been approved by the European Commission as part of the UK Bovine TB Eradication Plan. This has secured EU co-funding as set out below which partially offsets the above costs.

Calendar Year	EU co-funding
2014	£3,981,646.47
2013	£4,455,605.00
2012	£5,227,420.00
2011	£4,475,558.00
2010	£4,615,083.00

The 2015 figure is not yet available.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) to outline the extent to which pollution from agriculture will prevent attainment of water quality standards required of the Water Framework Directive; and (ii) to provide the assurance that entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ulster Farmers Union which could see polluters no longer facing prosecution for less serious pollution offences will not further undermine water quality in waterways and ground water.

(AQW 1781/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: NIEA is the government agency responsible for monitoring and protecting Northern Ireland's environment. NIEA works alongside other DAERA colleagues to raise awareness of environmental obligations and support farmers in delivering better environmental and economic outcomes, through increased compliance and sustainable farming practices. NIEA's strategic objective is "to create prosperity and well-being through environment and heritage excellence".

Farming is a critical sector for economic success in Northern Ireland. Successful farming depends on a clean and healthy environment. To this end NIEA engages with a range of stakeholders throughout the farming community to promote partnership working with a view to delivering better environmental outcomes and supporting sustainable and profitable farming. Previous negotiations between NIEA and UFU on developing a MOU were unsuccessful but all parties have agreed to re-engage in the process as they are committed to building a stronger, more effective working arrangement to deliver environmental outcomes in ways that reduce conflict and support improved farm profitability.

As you are aware NIEA is the competent control authority for a number of Statutory Management Requirements under the Basic Payment Scheme and carries out inspections of farm businesses through the cross-compliance programme. In addition NIEA investigates pollution incidents and other environmental issues, carries out routine monitoring of waterways and habitats. NIEA will continue to fulfil these statutory functions and consider that they will be best achieved through a partnership-approach while operating within all legislative requirements. NIEA will continue to apply its enforcement and prosecution policy in relation to pollution incidents.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how much of her departmental budget is assigned to health and safety training for farmers and farming families.

(AQO 161/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department recognises that there are health and safety risks within the working environment of the agriculture industry in Northern Ireland. Statistics show that there were 68 agriculture-related fatalities between 2006 and

2015. As such, my Department works collaboratively with its partners on the Farm Safety Partnership to increase farm safety awareness.

Health and Safety is a significant component in training courses for farmers and growers which are delivered by my Department at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE). These courses include Safe Use in Pesticides; Rough Terrain Telescopic Handler Training and Tractor Driving. The annual budget for delivering this training is approximately £450,000. CAFRE also delivers education and training programmes to students, farmers and farm families which include Health and Safety Awareness on subjects such as handling livestock, working with machinery and management of slurry.

CAFRE delivers the £20 million Knowledge Transfer element of the Farm Business Improvement Scheme under the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020. Knowledge Transfer includes Business Development Groups (BDG) and Farm Family Key Skills (FFKS). It is expected that 3000 BDG participants will undertake a core module on Health and Safety Awareness whilst 5000 FFKS participants will undertake Health and Safety Awareness Training. This FFKS training has an estimated budget of £220,000 over the term of the RDP.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department will commission a programme of work to identify the legislation imposing European Union directives to be repealed when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 2004/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: As I announced on 28 June 2016, my Department is establishing a team of senior officials to consider the implications for functions, legislation, and regulations of the UK leaving the EU, and to identify future challenges and opportunities. The remit of the team will also include a review of all the legislation my Department currently operates under that derives from EU Directives or Regulations, and an assessment of the scale of legislative change that may be required to domestic legislation, both locally and nationally.

My officials will engage with Whitehall and the other Devolved Administrations to look at both extant legislation and legislation due for adoption during the transition period.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what assurances she can give to stakeholders in her departmental portfolio that they and Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged as the outcome of the EU Referendum is implemented.

(AQW 2061/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I would like to assure stakeholders that business will continue as usual across my entire Departmental portfolio until the UK Government has negotiated a withdrawal treaty with the European Union.

These negotiations will take a number of years to complete and it is important to note that EU support will remain in place during the period of transition. This will provide a certain degree of stability while we develop and implement a range of new policies which will be better tailored to our own local needs.

Northern Ireland's interests will be pursued within the UK rather than within a group of 28 countries with disparate agendas, so we will have greater influence and a better opportunity to secure a position which properly reflects our specific circumstances.

My priority will be to ensure that Northern Ireland's interests are protected. This is a great opportunity which we should approach with confidence and with a clear sense of the potential advantages for Northern Ireland. I am committed to working with all stakeholders as we move forward to ensure we achieve a good outcome for farmers, the agri-food, fishing and forestry sectors and the environment.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the implications of the result of the EU Referendum for the (i) fisheries industry and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund; (ii) Common Agricultural Policy Pillar I; (iii) the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (2014-2020), especially in relation to securing business case approval from the Department of Finance; (iv) the Going for Growth Strategy; and (v) all other aspects of her departmental portfolio; and what relevant contingencies are in place.

(AQW 2062/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: There will be wide ranging implications for my Department as a result of the UK withdrawing from the EU, however business will continue as usual across my portfolio of responsibilities until the UK Government has negotiated a withdrawal treaty with the European Union.

These negotiations will take a number of years to complete and it is important to note that EU support via the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, Common Agricultural Policy Pillar I and the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (2014-2020) will remain in place during this period of negotiation. This will provide a certain degree of stability while we develop and implement a range of new policies which I anticipate will be better tailored to our own local needs in the future.

We will continue to make the most of measures through the new Rural Development Programme to help ensure that farmers are better equipped to meet the challenges ahead and take advantage of future market opportunities. My Department is continuing to develop business cases for the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and measures under the Rural Development Programme and will seek approval through the normal channels with the Department of Finance.

The Northern Ireland agri-food sector is one of the most strategically important sectors to our local economy and will be a key driver in securing economic growth going forward. I remain committed to delivering on the actions for my Department contained in the Northern Ireland Executive Response to the Agri-Food Strategy Board's Going for Growth. The Economy Minister and I intend to work closely on our key priorities to deliver growth for the sector, such as through the support our Departments provide to agri-food companies, in looking for new export markets and in progressing the development of the agri-food marketing body

The trading and support framework that will apply to the agricultural and fisheries sectors following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation and agreement within the UK, between the UK and the EU and between the UK and its other trading partners over the course of the next number of years.

We face a considerable challenge in terms of the work that needs to be done and as I announced on 28 June 2016 my Department is establishing a team of senior officials to consider the potential challenges and opportunities moving forward. The remit of this team will include identifying the scale of legislative change that will be required and the need for additional contingency plans.

I am committed to working with all parties as we move forward to ensure we achieve a good outcome for farmers, the agri-food and fishing sectors as well as the environment and environment stakeholders and our rural economy.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on what date her Department; (i) sought; and (ii) received the legal advice which is now preventing her from establishing the public inquiry into illegal waste disposal that was called for in an Assembly motion passed in March 2014.

(AQW 2111/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: In response to a question in the Assembly on 20th June 2016, I explained that the previous Executive had considered suggestions for a public inquiry into waste management and disposal arrangements in Northern Ireland, prompted by the discovery of illegal dumping at Mobuoy. However, in light of the focus on dealing with the issues through implementation of the Mills Report, concern about the undefined costs of an inquiry and ensuring that any criminal proceeding were able to take their course no agreement was reached before the end of the last mandate.

I am not aware of the specific legal advice referred to.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many times in each of the last five years have officials or ex-officials been referred to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for the offence of (i) misfeasance; or (ii) malfeasance in a public office.

(AQW 2112/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: No DAERA officials or ex-officials have been referred to the PSNI for the offence of misfeasance or malfeasance in a public office in the last five years.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the total value of Rural Development Programme funding which has been delivered to community groups and businesses in West Tyrone each year since 2011; and whether, following the recent EU referendum result, her Department or the British Treasury will be able to replace, or secure, a similar level of support for local community groups and businesses in West Tyrone over the next five years.

(AQW 2235/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The 'Quality of Life Axis' (Axis 3) of the 2007-2013 NI Rural Development Programme (RDP), delivered by Local Action Groups, provided funding opportunities for rural community groups and businesses. The total value of Axis 3 RDP funding delivered to rural community groups and businesses in West Tyrone since 2011 was £8.9m. A breakdown of this funding is provided in the table below.

The total value of Rural Development Programme funding delivered to community groups and businesses in West Tyrone since 2011

£'000

RDP 2007/2013 Funding	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
Community Groups	200	587	1,435	1,562	352	0	4,136
Business	982	786	679	1,566	738	0	4,751
Totals	1,182	1,373	2,114	3,128	1,090	0	8,887

Priority 6 (Social inclusion, poverty reduction and rural economic development) of the NI RDP 2014-2020 will be delivered by Local Action Groups and will provide opportunities for community groups and businesses to benefit from funding investment. Until the UK Government has negotiated a withdrawal treaty with the EU it is not possible to say how the NI RDP 2014-2020 budget will be affected.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for her assessment of the removal of the training department from the Greenmount campus; and (ii) whether she will fully reinstate it.

(AQW 2295/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department continues to deliver lifelong learning programmes at the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) and as such there are no current plans to cease training at Greenmount Campus.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the creation of a new environmental advisory division within her Department.

(AQW 2297/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Our environment is one of Northern Ireland's greatest assets and how we use it is inextricably linked to economic prosperity and well-being. This was the key reason for me to explore a new environmental advisory function within the Department to help industry, and farmers, to deliver profitably and sustainably.

DAERA currently provides advice to a wide range of customers. Consideration is being given to how best to take this forward. This work is still at an early stage of development.

Department for Communities

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Communities to outline what action his Department is taking to address dog fouling in Bells Hill, Limavady.

(AQW 2276/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): While the Department has policy responsibility for this issue, responsibility for implementing that policy rests with the relevant Council.

The Clean Neighbourhoods & Environment Act (NI) 2011 gave Councils access to more robust powers to deal with dog fouling through the adoption of a Dog Control Order regime.

Under this regime Councils may make Orders creating offences for a range of dog related matters, including failure to remove dog faeces. An increased fixed penalty notice of up to £80 may be issued or a maximum fine of £1,000 may be imposed by a court. Where the Council has not adopted the Dog Control Order regime a fixed penalty notice of £50 may be issued under the provisions of the Litter (NI) Order 1994.

The table below gives an indication of enforcement activity by district councils in respect of dog fouling between 2010/11 and 2014/15.

Dog Fouling: Number of Fixed Penalty Notices Issued

New Council	Council District	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Antrim & Newtownabbey	Antrim	0	0	2	1	4
	Newtownabbey	33	17	16	24	8
Mid & East Antrim	Ballymena	2	9	6	8	6
	Carrickfergus	0	3	0	2	1
	Larne	3	2	8	6	1
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	Armagh	2	5	3	7	10
	Banbridge	0	1	3	1	3
	Craigavon	50	38	48	44	27
Belfast	Belfast	160	92	189	223	152
Causeway Coast & Glens	Ballymoney	1	0	1	1	0
	Coleraine	33	17	8	25	25
	Limavady	1	0	1	0	0
	Moyle	2	1	2	1	0
Derry City & Strabane	Derry City	1	3	1	11	10
	Strabane	2	2	7	10	4
Fermanagh & Omagh	Fermanagh	0	0	1	9	6
	Omagh	0	1	2	3	3

New Council	Council District	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Mid Ulster	Cookstown	1	0	1	0	0
	Dungannon & South Tyrone	0	0	3	3	1
	Magherafelt	1	0	0	2	3
Newry, Mourne & Down	Down	10	16	9	13	19
	Newry & Mourne	5	4	4	3	11
North Down & Ards	Ards	8	13	15	5	37
	North Down	6	1	5	1	4
Lisburn & Castlereagh	Castlereagh	0	0	14	6	6
	Lisburn	2	6	15	2	0
Totals		323	231	364	411	341

Department for the Economy

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail all capital projects that are (i) currently being completed; and (ii) expected to be completed in the next three years in West Tyrone.

(AQW 540/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): The tables below detail my Department's current capital projects being completed and those expected to be completed in the next three years in West Tyrone.

West Tyrone Capital Projects

(i) currently being completed

Name of Capital Project	Project Location (Town)	Cost (£,000)	Expected Date of Completion
Gas to the West project (part)	Strabane	11,800 (estimated costs relate to the Maydown to Strabane pipeline only)	October 2016 for the pipeline between Maydown and Strabane, with local gas distribution networks provided over subsequent years.
Name of Capital Project	Project Location (Town)	Cost (£,000)	Expected Date of Completion
NI Broadband Improvement Project (including Satellite Broadband Support Scheme)	All of Northern Ireland*	£19.3m (£1.56m still to be spent)	31 March 2017

(ii) expected to be completed in next three years

Name of Capital Project	Project Location (Town)	Cost (£,000)	Expected Date of Completion
Gas to the West Project (part)	Omagh (The Gas to the West project also includes new gas networks to Dungannon, Coalisland, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Enniskillen and Derrylin)	8,500 (note that above estimated costs relate to planned expenditure on the main pipeline in West Tyrone to serve Omagh, which is part of the new gas network to serve other main towns in the West)	Construction of the main gas pipeline in the West is anticipated to commence in 2017, subject to planning and other consents, with local gas distribution networks to be provided over subsequent years.

Name of Capital Project	Project Location (Town)	Cost (£,000)	Expected Date of Completion
Superfast Roll-out Programme	All of Northern Ireland*	£14.1m (£6.8m still to be spent)	31 December 2017

* NI Broadband Improvement Project covers all of Northern Ireland including West Tyrone.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the amount his Department and its arms-length bodies have spent in promoting tourism in West Tyrone.

(AQW 1067/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Both Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland undertake marketing campaigns throughout the year to market Northern Ireland as a tourism destination.

Whilst it is not possible to extract marketing spend on a constituency by constituency basis the following provides an indication of the action taken to promote West Tyrone.

In addition to funding capital projects and events, Tourism NI has spent £15.5million on marketing campaigns promoting Northern Ireland since April 2011 until the present. As part of each campaign, the tourism industry is encouraged to provide offers to underpin the campaign, which are then displayed on www.discovernorthernireland.com

From April 2011 – March 2016, 2758 properties in total have featured, collectively providing a total of 18,854 offers.

Approximately 6% of the properties that participated were from the constituency, providing approximately 2% of the offers.

Tourism Ireland has worked with tourism businesses in West Tyrone to promote the visitor attractions and holiday experiences of the region overseas. Some examples are provided below.

The Sperrins feature in Tourism Ireland's new film – Ten amazing places in Northern Ireland – which is currently being promoted via Tourism Ireland's social media platforms, Facebook (3.6 million fans worldwide), Twitter (346,000 followers) and on YouTube.

Visitor attractions of Tyrone are highlighted on Ireland.com, Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites (29 market sites available in ten language versions), which attracts over 16.6 million unique visitors each year.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the level of departmental support given to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in East Derry.

(AQW 1094/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below details the amount of support offered by Invest NI to Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in the East Londonderry constituency in each of the last five financial years.

Invest NI Support Offered to SMEs in East Londonderry

Year	Total Support £m
2011-12	1.37
2012-13	2.42
2013-14	2.50
2014-15	1.32
2015-16	1.72

Note: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects, therefore the data above may differ to previously published information.

Invest NI makes offers of support to companies based on business plans received. These offers are only paid to businesses once key milestones and targets have been met.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the assistance given by his Department to the steel industry.

(AQW 1099/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: There is no actual steel industry in Northern Ireland. However, Invest NI has provided support to a number of structural steelwork and architectural steelwork companies that manufacture steel related products. The support offered has primarily been to develop sales and marketing in export markets to encourage securing sales in countries outside of Northern Ireland.

Mr Poots asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what consideration is being given to raising the cap on university places.

(AQW 1237/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap on full-time undergraduate places at the Northern Ireland universities is subject to ongoing review in light of resource outcomes from the Budget process.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) all grants to the milk processing sector; (ii) the recipients; (iii) the amount awarded; and (iv) the purpose of each grant, broken down for the last five years.

(AQW 1317/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: As the table below indicates, Invest NI has offered financial assistance of £4,080,831 to companies within the dairy processing sector over the past five years. This support has been offered through a number of schemes and programmes including Selective Financial Assistance, Growth Accelerator Programme, Jobs Fund and Grant for R&D.

Client Name	Year (Fin)	Total Assistance Offered	Intervention Type
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	11-12	£10,226	Investing in R&D
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	11-12	£3,920	Developing Skills
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	11-12	£16,000	Creating Jobs
Barbara Simms	11-12	£3,200	Other
Brennans Ltd	11-12	£4,900	Other
Glastry Farm Ice Cream Limited	11-12	£2,540	Developing Innovation & Technology
John Doherty	11-12	£802.00	Developing Innovation & Technology
Mullins Ice Cream Ltd	11-12	£6,709	Investing in R&D
The Clandeboye Estate Company Limited	11-12	£15,000	Creating Jobs
United Dairy Farmers Limited	11-12	£120,429	Investing in R&D
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£295,612	Investing in R&D
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£600,000	Creating Jobs
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£12,740	Developing Skills
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£440,922	Investing in R&D
Farmview Dairies Limited	12-13	£14,590	Creating Jobs
Fivemiletown & Brookeborough Co-Operative Agricultural & Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£48,797	Investing in R&D
Fivemiletown & Brookeborough Co-Operative Agricultural & Dairy Society Limited	12-13	£162,237	Developing Skills
L.E. Pritchitt & Company Limited	12-13	£1,500,000	Creating Jobs
L.E. Pritchitt & Company Limited	12-13	£65,957	Investing in R&D
United Dairy Farmers Limited	12-13	£121,775	Investing in R&D
Allison Abernethy	13-14	£11,000	Creating Jobs
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	13-14	£86,846	Developing Skills
Ballyrashane Co-Operative Agricultural and Dairy Society Limited	13-14	£25,000	Developing Innovation & Technology
Golden Cow Dairies Limited	13-14	£100,000	Creating Jobs

Client Name	Year (Fin)	Total Assistance Offered	Intervention Type
Dale Farm Limited	14-15	£305,808	Developing Skills
Quinns Gelato Limited	14-15	£1,000	Developing Innovation & Technology
Quinns Gelato Limited	14-15	£1,200	Developing Innovation & Technology
United Dairy Farmers Limited	14-15	£34,064	Developing Skills
Quinns Gelato Limited	15-16	£34,500	Creating Jobs
Quinns Gelato Limited	15-16	£3,552	Developing Innovation & Technology
Quinns Gelato Limited	15-16	£3,950	Developing Innovation & Technology
Tamnagh Foods Limited	15-16	£1,175	Developing Innovation & Technology
Tamnagh Foods Limited	15-16	£2,330	Developing Skills
The Clondeboye Estate Company Limited	15-16	£24,050	Creating Jobs
Total		£4,080,831	

In addition, non-financial support, valued at £244k, has been offered to businesses in the past five years including trade events, resource efficiency audits and marketing events.

In total, Invest NI's assistance to these companies has the potential to leverage in excess of £36m of investment.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the level of ongoing support to the milk processing sector.
(AQW 1318/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI has offered £4,080,831 in financial assistance over the past five years and continues to support dairy processors through a number of schemes and programmes including Selective Financial Assistance, Growth Accelerator Programme and Grant for R&D, plus providing advice and technical assistance.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether (i) consideration has been given to attaching social clauses to grants to the milk processing sector which would necessitate demonstrable increase in return to the producers; and (ii) if not, whether such consideration will now be undertaken.

(AQW 1319/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: No consideration has been given to attaching social clauses to Letters of Offer for the milk processing sector.

The price paid to milk producers is a commercial arrangement between processors and producers, and is often dictated by complex global market forces.

I do not intend to introduce social clauses to grants to the milk processing sector.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether an holistic improvement in the viability of the milk sector can be considered relevant in how grant aid applications are determined.

(AQW 1320/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Grant aid applications are determined on a case by case basis and this includes an assessment of the viability of both the company and the project. This assesses both the commercial strength and sustainability of the customer and the project. Viability must be satisfied before any support is offered.

Support is offered to secure a range of positive economic outcomes for the local economy. These include new jobs created, increase in turnover and increase in export/external sales.

Supported projects are typically implemented over a three to five year period. During this time, it is likely that prices paid and received for milk and dairy products will fluctuate due to the global nature of milk price setting and the competitive nature of the target retail sectors.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether he plans to including in the measurement of outcomes of grant aid to the milk processing sector a knock-on enhancement in the price paid to the producers.

(AQW 1321/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Farm-gate milk prices are determined by many complex global factors and market forces. These are outside the direct control of local producers and processors.

When supported projects are assessed, a range of outcomes will be measured in terms of the positive benefits that accrue to the local economy. These include new jobs created, increase in company turnover and increase in exports/external sales.

I have no plans to include a knock-on enhancement in the price paid to producers as a specific, measurable outcome.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy how grants to the milk processing sector are policed to ensure compliance with any attached conditions.

(AQW 1479/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI follows a standard procedure to monitor progress of projects against outcomes and conditions agreed with the customer before an offer of support is issued.

Generally, projects are monitored on an annual basis at which time the conditions of support are scrutinised to ensure compliance. Following the conclusion of the project the cost-effectiveness and benefits to the local economy accrued as a result of the assistance are measured and compared to those stated within the case for support.

This procedure is followed for projects within the dairy sector in common with all sectors supported by Invest NI.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will develop an economic development strategy for East Antrim.
(AQW 1512/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Through the new Programme for Government 2016-2021, the refocus of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy and the work of my Department and Invest NI, I am committed to improving the economic prospects of the whole of Northern Ireland.

On the 27th May the Executive published our draft Programme for Government Framework 2016 -2020 for consultation. The new Programme for Government sets out the ambition the Executive has for our society as a whole. In parallel with this work the Executive has tasked my Department with leading work on refocusing the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy to take account of the decision taken with respect of the Corporation Tax rate for Northern Ireland as well as the economic indicators and measures set out in the new draft Programme for Government. We will be actively engaging with the councils during the development of the refocused Economic Strategy to set out collective priorities for promoting economic development across all council areas. The refocused Economic Strategy will set out key activities to deliver economic growth across the whole of Northern Ireland.

I do not believe there is merit or need for my Department to develop a standalone economic development strategy for East Antrim as Invest NI has been working closely with Mid and East Antrim Borough Council to help with the development of its Integrated Economic Development Strategy for the period 2016–2020. The Council is currently undertaking work to ensure its Integrated Economic Development Strategy aligns with the draft Programme for Government (2016 – 2021) and plans to publish the Strategy following the launch of the Programme for Government.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy whether he has engaged with the City of Derry Airport with the view to increasing flight destinations.

(AQW 1583/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My officials have recently met with City of Derry Airport representatives in both May and June 2016 to discuss what support is available to encourage new route opportunities which demonstrate an economic benefit in terms of business or inbound tourism. Any discussions with airlines are a commercial matter and are confidential. The airport has also been successful in its application to the UK Regional Air Connectivity fund for a Dublin Airport route, operated by Citywings.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail his Department's strategy for further developing the engineering sector in the Omagh district and other parts of County Tyrone, including growth of exports and collaborative working with Higher and Further Education Colleges.

(AQW 1734/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department and Invest NI work closely with companies in the engineering sectors to assist them to grow their businesses, develop new products and to secure sales in markets outside of Northern Ireland.

In June 2016, 40 of Northern Ireland's most successful materials handling companies, many from County Tyrone including Terex and Sandvik (Dungannon), McCloskey (Coalisland) and Telestack (Omagh), exhibited at Hillhead in Derbyshire, the leading exhibition for the quarrying, construction and recycling industries, where Invest NI also had a presence to promote this important sector.

In the last five years, Invest NI has made some 1,900 offers of assistance to engineering companies in County Tyrone amounting to £46m. This supported total investment of £243m and promoted 2,230 new jobs.

The Department is currently implementing major reforms to Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training system. The new system is expected to have a transformative impact on the supply of skills from Level 2 upwards, particularly at higher levels and will support the growth and rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy.

In advance of full implementation of the new system the Department is undertaking a series of pilots to test components, including a number within the engineering sector in the Omagh and South Tyrone.

There are currently 6 Higher Level Apprenticeship pilot programmes in Engineering, Sustainable Construction, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Renewables and Sustainability, Food Manufacturing and Automotive Engineering within Omagh and South Tyrone with a total of 43 Higher Level Apprentices. A Level 3 pilot apprenticeship in Automotive Engineering commenced at the Dungannon campus of South West College in September 2015.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the amount of funding that his Department has facilitated from European funding streams during each of the last five years.

(AQW 1765/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: During the past 5 years, £263m has been claimed from the European Commission in respect of the EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme 2007-2013 (both ERDF and ESF) and in respect of this Department's participation in the Interreg IVa programme managed by the Special EU Programmes Body.

	2011 £m	2012 £m	2013 £m	2014 £m	2015 £m	Total £m
Interreg IVa	£1.519	£3.417	£3.108	£6.586	£4.126	£18.756
EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme (ERDF)	£24.836	£14.167	£35.975	£39.914	£39.880	£154.772
EU Sustainable Competitiveness Programme (ESF)	£18.446	£7.614	£8.734	£25.986	£28.658	£89.438
Totals	£44.801	£25.198	£47.817	£72.486	£72.664	£262.966

In addition, the 2014 – 2020 Investment in Growth and Jobs Programme for ERDF and ESF was approved by the European Commission in December 2014. The allocated amounts are €205m for ESF and €308m for ERDF. Both Programmes are fully operational. DfE will facilitate the submission of claims to the EC once verification and certification procedures have been completed.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for the Economy how he will ensure that InvestNI attracts a greater number of new jobs to Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 1774/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI has a close working relationship with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, supporting the development of its Community Plan and helping the council identify its unique proposition to help attract investment into the area.

Invest NI continues to provide support, advice and guidance to businesses in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone area. In the last five years it has offered over £30m of support to nearly 500 businesses in the area. This has contributed to £213m in investment in the area, promoting 3,182 new jobs, and creating 2,205.

Invest NI also provides a range of support and practical assistance to entrepreneurs to help start new businesses across Northern Ireland including Fermanagh and South Tyrone. These interventions may be of a financial and non-financial nature.

Export and Global Start assistance is available to entrepreneurs starting an export-focused business or an established business 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.

Additionally, the Regional Start Initiative, now delivered on behalf of local councils by Enterprise NI, provides individuals who wish to start their own business with advice and the capability to produce their own business plan. The intention is that this business plan will provide a template for the new entrepreneur to plan and access sources of funds for the business.

Invest NI continues to compete globally to attract inward investment to Northern Ireland as a whole. Where a potential investor indicates particular needs for a project, Invest NI will suggest possible suitable locations to best meet those needs. The decision as to where to locate however, ultimately remains with the investor. An example of a recent inward investment to the area is the announcement by Teleperformance, and its plans to create 800 new jobs in Fermanagh.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on plans for a new campus for the Southern Regional College in Armagh.

(AQW 1795/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Southern Regional College is proceeding with plans to replace the Armagh campus with a new build on the existing College Hill/Lonsdale Road site. An Integrated Consultancy Team was appointed in August 2015 to take forward the design. A 12 week community consultation is currently taking place on the proposed plans which included an open day on 27 June 2016 to allow the public to view the proposals.

Southern Regional College is also taking forward new build projects at Banbridge and Craigavon and while all three projects are currently at design phase the progression of each of the new builds is dependent upon securing the necessary capital resources in the new Comprehensive Spending Review. Given the importance of further education in meeting the skills needs of the Northern Ireland economy, I will be making a very strong case to the Executive for the resources needed to take forward these and the other major capital projects which my Department is currently progressing.

If resources are secured, it is intended that construction will commence on the Armagh campus in January 2018.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for the Economy (i) how much Northern Ireland has received in funding from the European Social Fund in each of the last three years; (ii) when funding will cease as a result of the UK voting to leave the EU; and (iii) what steps he will take to ensure that projects funded by the ESF will receive alternative public funding.

(AQW 1868/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) During the last three years, Northern Ireland has received £45.67m from Europe in respect of the European Social Fund (ESF).

Financial Year	Total Funding received
2015/16	£8,310,343.28
2014/15	£10,785,890.68
2013/14	£26,578,620.49

- (ii) It is anticipated that the EU Programmes will continue to operate during the UK/EU negotiation period. However, in the event of a shortfall, my Department would bid to the Department of Finance for replacement Exchequer funding for any projects supported by the ESF programme.
- (iii) Future priorities and funding will be the subject of negotiations between the NI Executive and the UK Government, and between the UK Government and the EU institutions.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy whether salaries for support staff are benchmarked across the six further education colleges.

(AQW 1921/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Non-teaching/support staff in Further Education (FE) Colleges in Northern Ireland have contractual links to National Joint Council (NJC) pay agreements. While contracts of employment, including pay and conditions for staff, are local to each College, a non-teaching Staff Negotiating Committee exists and is recognized by all Colleges for collective bargaining purposes. The agreement reached at the non-teaching Staff Negotiating Committee in relation to pay (including pay increases and spinal progression payments) is legally binding on the Colleges.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the timescale for commencement of the Southern Regional College new builds in Upper Bann.

(AQW 1922/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Southern Regional College is taking forward three new build projects at Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon, the latter two of which are situated in the Upper Bann constituency. An Integrated Consultancy team was appointed in August 2015 to take forward the design and secure the necessary statutory approvals for all three projects. Subject to completion of this work, construction is currently planned to commence on the Banbridge campus in November 2017 and on the Craigavon campus in January 2018.

However, progression into construction will be dependent upon securing the necessary capital resources in the new Comprehensive Spending Review. Given the importance of further education in meeting the skills needs of the Northern Ireland economy, I will be making a very strong case in the Executive for the resources needed to take forward these and the other major capital projects which my Department is currently progressing.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the proposed new builds for Southern Regional College's (i) Banbridge; and (ii) Craigavon campuses.

(AQW 1924/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Southern Regional College is taking forward new build projects at Banbridge and Craigavon, as well as at its Armagh campus. The contract for a design team for all three developments was awarded to WYG on 19 August 2015 and preferred layouts have been agreed for each site.

Ongoing discussions with the Planning Service are proving positive. Formal community consultation is mandatory for these projects and a number of communication initiatives and events have taken place as part of the Planning Application process.

Construction is currently planned to commence on the Banbridge campus in November 2017 followed by Craigavon campus in January 2018, subject to securing the necessary statutory approvals and availability of funding in the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total level of financial assistance provided by Invest NI to new and existing businesses in Upper Bann in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1944/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The information that you requested can be found on Invest NI's website on the page entitled 'Our Performance'. A link has been included below for ease.

<http://www.investni.com/about-us/what-we-do/our-performance.html>

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy to detail whether his Department will provide a broadband voucher scheme.

(AQW 1977/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Currently my Department does not have any plans to introduce a broadband voucher scheme.

My Department's strategy, "Continuing to Connect - Telecoms 2015- 2017", committed to the completion of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) and delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme (SRP).

This strategy recognises existing budgetary pressures. Any further telecoms interventions will reflect the outcome of the Programme for Government.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on broadband connectivity speeds in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

(AQW 1978/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Information on fixed-line broadband speeds is gathered and published by Ofcom through a number of reports. The information is published at local authority level rather than by constituency. Information related to the local authority areas that would cover the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Constituency, taken from 'Connected Nations 2015' is set out in the table.

	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	Fermanagh and Omagh	Mid-Ulster	Northern Ireland
Next Generation Access (NGA)Availability (% premises)	93	91	94	95
Superfast Availability (% premises)	70	50	55	77
Average Download Speed (Mbps)	21.5	20.1	21.5	28.3
Average Upload Speed (Mbps)	4.2	4.5	4.5	4.5

The Connected Nations reports and associated data can be found at <http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/market-data-research/market-data/infrastructure/connected-nations-2015/downloads/>

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for an update on the future of Strabane Business Park.

(AQW 1996/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The development of Strabane Business Park released approximately 16 acres of new industrial land to support economic development not only within Strabane but also the wider West Tyrone area.

This land is proactively marketed to potential investors, both indigenous and foreign direct. In the last number of months Invest NI has had discussions with a number of companies regarding their interest in locating to Strabane Business Park. Invest NI will continue to pursue these and any future suitable property interests, however the final decision rests solely with the investor.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the support his Department has given to JMG Systems in Omagh.

(AQW 1997/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Between 2011/12 and 2015/16 J.M.G. Systems Ltd has been offered a total of £249,169 support by Invest NI across the range of financial and practical assistance. This support has been both financial and non-financial, across areas such as skills, research and development, job creation and export advice.

Invest NI makes offers of support to companies based on business plans received. These offers are only paid to businesses once key milestones and targets have been met.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for the Economy how is Department is addressing the lack of post 19 educational provision in Upper Bann.

(AQW 2032/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Southern Regional College (SRC) offers a range of educational provision for all age groups at all its campuses, three of which are in Upper Bann at Portadown, Lurgan and Banbridge. In 2014/15 (the latest available figures) SRC had 30,076 enrolments which made up 17.1% of all Further Education (FE) college enrolments in Northern Ireland. 14,104 of SRC's enrolments were people aged 20 years and older.

FE colleges are responsible for determining their own curriculum provision and it is the responsibility of each college to assess the need for specific courses, taking into consideration all relevant factors, such as, potential demand, transport infrastructure, and viability.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for the Economy whether the Executive or InvestNI will continue to fund the poultry manure processing facility in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2080/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI, under the Sustainable Utilisation of Poultry Litter scheme (SUPL), has entered into a binding legal agreement to part fund the development of an Anaerobic Digester facility at Ballybofey, Donegal, and is committed to honouring this contract.

On completion this facility will have capacity to process 25,000 tonnes of Northern Ireland poultry litter per annum. Construction is currently in progress with the facility on target to become operational in early 2017. Biogas produced at this facility will be transported back to Northern Ireland where it will be used to generate nearly 4MW of competitively priced renewable electricity per annum for manufacturing firms Bombardier and Montupet at locations in Belfast, Newtownards, Newtownabbey and Dunmurry.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any action being taken to provide courses for apprenticeships in electrical engineering at further education colleges.

(AQW 2085/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Further Education Colleges are mindful of the need to develop and grow the provision of higher level skills, including those that equip students with the skills to work in the electrical engineering sector.

While my Department sets the strategic direction for the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland, each College is responsible for its own curriculum offer.

The ApprenticeshipsNI Programme currently offers 140 frameworks at Levels 2 and 3 including electrical engineering and is currently delivered across Northern Ireland by a network of forty contracted training suppliers which includes the Further Education Colleges.

My Department is currently implementing major reforms of Northern Ireland's professional and technical education and training system. The new Apprenticeship and Youth Training system is expected to have a transformative impact on the supply of skills from level 2 upwards, particularly at higher levels and will support the growth and rebalancing of the Northern Ireland economy.

The primary benefit of the new system to the economy, and employers, will be a better matching of supply and demand for skills. As such, employer demand will be the main driver for the introduction of apprenticeship courses at further education colleges, including those in electrical engineering.

In advance of the full implementation of the new system my Department is undertaking a series of pilots to test components of the new system. This includes a Higher Level Apprenticeship in Advanced Engineering which offers the opportunity to undertake a qualification in Electrical/Electronic Engineering. A proposal for a Higher Level Apprenticeship pilot in Electrical Engineering for September 2016 is currently under consideration.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy what action his Department is taking to increase the skills base for apprentices in electrical engineering.

(AQW 2086/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's ApprenticeshipsNI programme is employer-led training provision. Apprentices, in paid employment from day one, follow a national training framework which leads to the attainment of industry approved competence and knowledge based qualifications, at Level 2 or 3, in conjunction with Essential Skills qualifications (where appropriate).

In the case of apprentices aged 16-24, my department funds 100% of the cost of off-the-job training.

Figures at the quarter ending October 2015 show occupancy on the ApprenticeshipNI Programme as follows:

- Electrical Distribution and Trans. Engineering – 66;
- Electrical Power Engineering – 16; and

■ Electro Technical – 730.

The latest published ApprenticeshipsNI Statistical Bulletin can be found by following the link below.
<https://www.delni.gov.uk/articles/apprenticeshipsni-statistics>

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans to stimulate the development of new grade A office accommodation.

(AQW 2104/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In May 2015 Invest NI launched a new scheme to stimulate the development of new Grade A office accommodation across Northern Ireland through the provision of mezzanine funding/equity to private sector property developers.

A total of five applications were received, three of which were considered to have met the scheme's eligibility criteria and Invest NI continues to engage with the promoters. Timescales for the development of the accommodation will largely be driven by the promoter.

Should these projects come to fruition they will introduce an additional c436,000 square feet of new Grade A office accommodation to the Belfast market.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for the Economy (i) how the student loan threshold figure of £17495 was arrived at; and (ii) whether the threshold figure can be reduced.

(AQW 2128/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Across the UK, repayment thresholds were increased from £10,000 to £15,000 in 2005. From April 2012, the repayment threshold for new and continuing students from Northern Ireland and Scotland has increased by inflation each year. As such, the threshold will be £17,495 in academic year 2016/2017.

For most borrowers, repayment is made through the tax system, involving employers and Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Loan accounts are administered by the Student Loans Company, which receives information from HMRC about repayments made through the tax system. HMRC have advised that the current system can only administer student repayments by using no more than two thresholds. England and Wales both use a current threshold of £21,000. Therefore, any reduction in the current threshold would, in the first instance, be a matter for negotiation with the other regional jurisdictions.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the targets set by the public authorities currently under his remit for how social consideration can be brought forward into contracts during this Comprehensive Spending Review period.

(AQW 2269/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department works closely with the Department of Finance on all procurement matters. The Department of Finance has a Programme for Government commitment to include Social Clauses in public procurement contracts for supplies, services and construction. Under the guidance of the Procurement Board, departments set their own targets for implementation of community benefits including Social Clauses in contracting. The targets for the Department for the Economy (DfE) have yet to be agreed.

The two previous Departments which now make up DfE (DEL/DETI) have contributed effectively to the Social Clause agenda, working in partnership with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD). They have helped CPD to improve knowledge and best practice across other Government Departments, Councils and Public Bodies through the Social Clause Practitioner Forum. DfE intends to build on this work to continue promoting the social clause agenda.

Department of Health

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health to outline (i) all the payroll computer systems utilised by Health and Social Care Trusts; (ii) the number of staff processed by each; (iii) all costs incurred for each system in each month of the last three years including any maintenance and breakdown fees; (iv) the commencement date of each contract; and (v) the intended termination date of each contract.

(AQW 1367/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health):

- i) The payroll system utilised across the HSC is SAP.
- ii) There are approximately 110,000 individual employee payroll records processed each month, including bank staff and multiple employments covering all monthly and non-monthly paid staff.
- iii) Total costs are deemed to be Commercial in Confidence.
- iv) The payroll software contract commenced on 8 November 2011.

v) The contract is for 10 years with an anticipated termination date in 2021.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health when the Bengoa report will be published.
(AQW 1482/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I received the panel's report on 21 July. Given the importance of the report I will need to fully consider its findings and recommendations with the hope that it will be published in the Autumn.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the current budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.
(AQW 1533/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As these questions both relate to the current budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

The revenue expenditure budget currently allocated to the South Eastern Trust for 2016/17 amounts to £528,527k (excluding non-cash).

The Trust's approach in allocating its budget is to have due regard to existing service commitments (service continuity), service developments, demographic adjustments, inflation (pay and non-pay), savings requirements (allocated equitably across services) and service pressures. Budgets are collated at Directorate level, with regular fundamental reviews (zero based/rebasing) to ensure budgets are kept up to date and relevant, and have due regard to equity, capitation and efficiency.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust allocates its budget.
(AQW 1535/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: As these questions both relate to the current budget for the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, a combined response has been provided.

The revenue expenditure budget currently allocated to the South Eastern Trust for 2016/17 amounts to £528,527k (excluding non-cash).

The Trust's approach in allocating its budget is to have due regard to existing service commitments (service continuity), service developments, demographic adjustments, inflation (pay and non-pay), savings requirements (allocated equitably across services) and service pressures. Budgets are collated at Directorate level, with regular fundamental reviews (zero based/rebasing) to ensure budgets are kept up to date and relevant, and have due regard to equity, capitation and efficiency.

Department for Infrastructure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to place in the Assembly Library a copy of the report into employee and management relations at Ballinamallard Rivers Agency Sub-Office, or any other name by which previously known, following an investigation in 2008.
(AQW 1493/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): This report followed an investigation by the former Department of Agriculture and Rural Development following an allegation from a member of Rivers Agency staff.

I am unable to place a copy of this report in the Assembly Library as it is not held by my Department.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 September 2016

Written Answers to Questions

The Executive Office

Mr Girvan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the regeneration of the Maze Long Kesh site.
(AQO 4/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): There is no current agreement on Maze/ Long Kesh Site issues. However, we are hopeful that we can reach agreement on the way forward for the development of the site.

Mr McNulty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the benefits of the Draft Programme for Government Framework for the people of Newry and Armagh.
(AQO 7/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government Framework agreed by the Executive on 26 May 2016 sets out the ambition the Executive has for all in our society, whether they are in Newry and Armagh, or anywhere else.

Its focus is on the major societal outcomes the Executive wants to achieve and provides the starting point for the development of detailed delivery plans and actions with the aim of delivering against the outcomes contained in the framework.

However, this work is not being carried out by Departments in isolation, and Executive Ministers will be using the period to take every opportunity to meet with stakeholders from all areas, and across all sectors, to discuss and learn more about the concerns and issues that affect people, and on the role they might play in contributing to the Executive's shared aims. Work therefore continues on finalising a draft PfG for further consultation in the autumn.

Mr T Buchanan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry.
(AQO 12/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The remit of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse is to examine if there were systemic failings by the state or institutions in their duties towards children under 18 in their residential care between 1922 and 1995.

The Inquiry remains within budget and completed the final module (Module 15) of its oral hearings in Banbridge Courthouse on 8 July 2016. Its recommendations, including its fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, will be made in its report to the Executive in January 2017.

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the Social Investment Fund, to outline the scoring and selection process that takes place after local groups scored and ranked the projects in their area.
(AQW 1109/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund is community led with local Steering Groups, in consultation with their wider community, developing and prioritising projects to address needs. The local Steering Groups have taken forward the scoring and selection of projects; submitting the final projects proposed for delivery to the Department.

In respect of the submitted projects, the Department has ensured that they align with the SIF criteria, were deliverable and represented value for money. Consequently, each project has been subject to an economic appraisal and a robust approvals process within the Department, prior to funding being committed.

Mr Beattie asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether the Executive will be appointing a representative to the armed forces Covenant Reference Group (ii) if not, to outline the reason; and (iii) what mechanisms are in place to ensure Members are made aware of the £10 million per annum Covenant Fund available to various charities and community groups.
(AQW 1389/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Armed Forces Covenant has not been adopted here and there has been no joint agreement to appoint a representative to the Armed Forces Covenant Reference Group.

No specific arrangements were made to make members aware of the Covenant Fund; however, details of how to apply are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covenant-fund-guidance-on-how-to-apply>

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department will set up a working group, including other relevant Departments, to assess models of and costings for financial redress in advance of the publication of the report of the Hart Inquiry.

(AQW 1398/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry's terms of reference, which were drawn up in consultation with victims and survivors, say that the Inquiry, in its report, will make recommendations and findings on four matters, including "The requirement of desirability for redress to be provided by the institution and/or the Executive to meet the particular needs of victims". They go on to say "However, the nature or level of any potential redress – financial or the provision of services – is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree following receipt of the Inquiry and Investigation report".

Although the Inquiry Chairman has publicly stated in his announcement on 4 November 2015 that he will recommend that there should be a scheme to award financial compensation to those children who suffered abuse in children's homes and other institutions here between 1922 and 1995, he also stated that the Inquiry has more work to do on the matter.

The Inquiry has carried out a targeted consultation on redress and has informed our officials that it will take a considerable period of time for the questionnaires to be analysed. The Inquiry does not anticipate making any further statements about redress until the Chairman publishes his report in 2017.

The Inquiry has yet to draw its conclusions from the evidence before it or to make recommendations, as required by its terms of reference. Its recommendations, including its fully formed recommendation with regard to redress, will be made in its report to the Executive in January 2017.

Mr McPhillips asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department proposes, at official and Ministerial levels, to meet with survivors, survivor groups and their representatives to discuss the process around and planning for financial redress now or any time before the report of the Hart Inquiry is published.

(AQW 1399/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We would refer the Member to our answer to AQW 1398/16-21 dated 24 August 2016.

Mr McGrath asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have instructed the Attorney General to advise on the impact of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, in particular sections 6(2)(d) and 7(1)(a), on the proposal to terminate the UK's membership of the European Union.

(AQW 1806/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We are not in a position to indicate whether the Attorney General has received instruction.

Mr McCrossan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the programmes for work already undertaken with regard to the vote to leave the European Union; and (ii) the programmes of work planned with regard to the vote to leave the European Union.

(AQW 1919/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what contact they have had with the Scottish Government since the referendum result; and when they plan to next meet the Scottish First Minister.

(AQW 1954/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We spoke with the Scottish First Minister on the day of the outcome of the EU referendum result. We also met with the Scottish First Minister, along with the leaders of the other British Irish Council Administrations, at a 'extraordinary' BIC Summit meeting on 22 July 2016.

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for their assessment of the implications of the result of the European Union for (a) the draft Programme for Government; (b) PEACE IV (c) Northern Ireland Task Force engagement; (d) and all other aspects of their Departmental portfolio; and (ii) to detail what relevant contingencies are in place as a consequence.

(AQW 2042/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: No decision has been taken on triggering Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union to initiate the formal negotiation to leave the European Union. The priority of the Executive will be to ensure that our interests are protected.

The draft Programme for Government Framework sets out the outcomes that the Executive seeks to achieve for citizens. While contextual issues will clearly be relevant to the delivery of these outcomes, the Framework itself is not affected.

The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The application process is currently ongoing and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

It is anticipated that all EU Programmes including PEACE IV will form part of the discussions that are to take place. In the interim, the SEUPB will continue to implement the delivery of PEACE IV as Managing Authority for the programme.

Engagement between the Executive and the EU Commission regarding the Northern Ireland Task Force will take place at an appropriate point.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

Mr Allen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the plans they have to locate alternative sources of funding to replace European Union funding streams which will be lost when the United Kingdom leaves the EU.
(AQW 2045/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The PEACE IV Programme was formally adopted by the European Commission on 30 November 2015. The eligible area for this cross-border programme consists of Northern Ireland and the six border counties of Louth, Monaghan, Cavan, Leitrim, Sligo and Donegal. The application process is currently ongoing, and no projects have yet been awarded funding.

It is anticipated that all EU Programmes, including PEACE IV, will form part of the discussions that are to take place with the European Union during the upcoming negotiations following the recent referendum decision. In the interim, the SEUPB will continue to implement the delivery of PEACE IV as Managing Authority for the programme.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the dates and times of meetings they have had with the Head of the Civil Service since the decision for the UK to leave the EU.
(AQW 2065/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Our Special Advisers liaised, on our behalf, with the Head of the Civil Service, Sir Malcolm McKibbin, over the weekend immediately following the outcome of the referendum. The Head of the Civil Service was instructed on Sunday 26 June to consider the implications of the EU referendum result and draw up plans for responding to emerging issues. This was followed up by a discussion at an Executive meeting on 29 June, at which the Head of the Civil Service was present, on the impact of the EU referendum.

In addition, we have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

Mr Butler asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what discussions have taken place with the European Commission to minimise disruption to Northern Ireland following the result of the EU referendum.
(AQW 2067/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Head of the Civil Service participated in a number of meetings with key stakeholders during a visit to Brussels on 30 June and 1 July. Detailed discussions will follow at a suitable point to seek to ensure that our specific circumstances must be accounted for in any new arrangements that are developed.

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Draft Framework for the Programme for Government will be revised to take account of the result of the referendum on the European Union.
(AQW 2099/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The draft Programme for Government (PfG) Framework sets out, in outcome terms, the improvements in wellbeing to which the Executive aspires for everyone in society.

Clearly the landscape within which we are developing the PfG has evolved following the EU Referendum. It is more important than ever that the Executive can present a compelling and coherent vision for the future. Work therefore continues on finalising a draft PfG for further consultation in the autumn.

The economic, social and investment strategies are being advanced in the same timescales and will complement the PfG. Delivery Plans, containing specific actions in support of the PfG are being developed, and we expect those plans to be ambitious but achievable taking into consideration all relevant prevailing circumstances.

Mr Allen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of officials who travelled with them to France to attend Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland matches at the European Championships; and (ii) the cost of travel for those officials per game.

(AQW 2139/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: We accepted an invitation from UEFA to attend some games as part of the 2016 European Football Championships in France.

The First Minister attended the Northern Ireland v Poland game on 12 June in Nice and Northern Ireland v Wales game on 25 June in Paris. On each trip the Minister was accompanied by a Special Adviser and a Private Secretary. The cost of travel for those officials was £2047.74 for the game in Nice and £1251.04 for the game in Paris.

The deputy First Minister attended the Northern Ireland v Germany game on 21 June in Paris and Republic of Ireland v Italy game on 22 June in Lille. He was accompanied by a Special Adviser, a Private Secretary and a Press Officer. The travel cost for those officials was £1943.13.

Mr McKay asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the meetings they have had concerning the European Union referendum, since the result was announced.

(AQW 2157/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: Since the result of the EU referendum was announced, the impact and implications of the decision have been discussed at the following meetings:

- a meeting of the Executive which we chaired on 29 June;
- a review meeting of the Stormont House and Fresh Start commitments chaired by the Secretary of State for NI and attended by the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs also on 29 June;
- the plenary meeting of NSMC on 4 July which was chaired by the Taoiseach; and
- a 'extraordinary' BIC Summit meeting on 22 July 2016.

Immediately following the outcome of the EU referendum we spoke to the then Prime Minister, David Cameron and we have since met with the Prime Minister Theresa May on 25 July.

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) to detail the engagements that the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service will have in Brussels and; (ii) whether they will publish a full itinerary of meetings that he will undertake during that visit.

(AQW 2192/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Head of the Civil Service fulfilled the following range of engagements during his visit to Brussels.

Thursday 30 June	
08.00	Meeting with Brussels Office staff
10.00	Meeting with Diane Dodds MEP
10.30	Meeting with Jim Nicholson MEP
11.30	Meeting with Ambassador Sir Ivan Rogers, UK Permanent Representative to the EU
12.30	Working lunch with NICS staff
14.00	Telephone call with Martina Anderson MEP
15.00	Meeting with Robert Parry, Head of the Welsh Government EU Office & Ian Campbell, Head of the Scottish Government EU Office
16.00	Meeting with Ambassador Declan Kelleher, Irish Permanent representative to the EU
17.00	Meeting with Lowri Evans, Director-General, DG GROW
18.30	Meeting with Koen Verlaeck, Secretary General, International Affairs
Friday 1 July	
08.00	Meeting with Brussels Office staff
09.30	Meeting with Martin Ruebens, Secretary General, Department of Chancellery and Public Governance
11.30	Closing meeting with Brussels Office staff

Ms S Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail any contact they have made with European Union officials to communicate the expressed will of the people in Northern Ireland to remain within the European Union.
(AQW 2200/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The Head of the Civil Service participated in a number of meetings with key stakeholders during a visit to Brussels on 30 June and 1 July. Detailed discussions will follow at a suitable point to seek to ensure that our specific circumstances are accounted for in any new arrangements.

Ms Bradshaw asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline (i) what position the Executive Office has adopted on Northern Ireland retaining full access to the European Single Market; and (ii) what discussions they have had with the First Minister of Scotland and Mayor of London on the subject.
(AQW 2203/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The priority of the Executive is to ensure that our interests are protected.

We have asked the Head of the Civil Service to establish individual departmental teams at senior level to consider the potential implications for each department. We also asked him to put in place an overarching central administrative and political governance structure that will report directly to us.

These teams will liaise with Whitehall, Irish and EU counterparts to ensure we get the best possible deal we can.

We spoke with the First Minister of Scotland on the day of the outcome of the referendum. We also met with the Scottish First Minister, along with other leaders of the British Irish Council Administrations, at an extraordinary BIC summit meeting on 26 July to consider the outcome of the referendum on EU membership. A copy of the communique for the meeting is available at <https://www.britishirishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/communique%C3%A9s/Cardiff%20Communique%20FINAL.pdf>

Mr Allen asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the (i) salaries; (ii) other benefits; and (iii) pension benefits of each Special Adviser in their Department, in each year since 2007/8.
(AQW 2309/16-21)

Mrs Foster and Mr McGuinness: The following table sets out the salaries and employer pension contributions paid to and on behalf of Special Advisers within the Executive Office, previously OFMDFM, for the financial years 2007-08 to 2015-16 inclusive.

Financial Year	Salary	Pension contributions
2007-08	£533,945	£98,529.99
2008-09	£613,908	£128,968.63
2009-10	£655,593	£136,966.88
2010-11	£656,522	£154,282.56
2011-12	£686,681	£152,803.86
2012-13	£682,647	£149,619.45
2013-14	£639,461	£147,967.24
2014-15	£672,885	£153,961.60
2015-16	£658,077	£163,929.91

There were no other benefits paid to Special Advisers during the above financial years.

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to ensure the recent fish kills in Six Mile Water and Glenavy River do not reoccur.
(AQW 615/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): There have unfortunately been several serious pollution related fish kills on the Six Mile Water and its tributaries over recent years; most recently in its Ballymartin River tributary in August 2015. Similarly there have been two recent fish kills on the Glenavy River, in October and December 2015. DAERA's Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) and DAERA Inland Fisheries carried out a detailed investigation of all these incidents.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that, as a result, NIEA is pursuing two prosecutions for these recent fish kills in the Glenavy and Six Mile Water.

However, while the prosecution of polluters acts as a valuable deterrent, it is equally important that, where at all possible, such incidents are prevented from occurring in the first place. I can assure you that I am committed to my Department doing everything possible to achieve this. As you will be aware, the recently formed Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has a wide remit: and so is potentially able to take practical action on a number of fronts to address pollution. Encouragingly, the number of serious pollution incidents across Northern Ireland and the number of pollution related fish kills have both been falling steadily for some years. This demonstrates that it is possible, with hard work and concerted action, to reduce the incidence of pollution and fish kills; but it is also vitally important that we all work to maintain this trend.

In the aftermath of the Six Mile Water and Glenavy fish kills staff from NIEA and other officials met several times with anglers on both rivers, the then Minister and other MLAs. These meetings were very productive. As a result NIEA is carrying out a detailed re-survey of Mallusk Industrial Estate, which was the source of the August 2015 fish kill on a tributary of the Six Mile Water. The survey has involved my staff visiting every premises within the industrial estate (totalling several hundred sites) to identify and rectify any pollution risks, collate an inventory of all chemicals held in the area and recheck drainage throughout the estate. It follows on from a long-standing programme of similar pollution prevention work in the wider area.

Likewise, in the aftermath of the Glenavy River fish kill NIEA staff have carried out a detailed survey of the Glenavy catchment: focussing particularly on minimising the risks of pollution from farms, as agricultural pollution has historically been the cause of most fish kills in this catchment.

While there is much that my Department is doing to tackle pollution and fish kills, we also rely heavily upon the cooperation and goodwill of the public. I am therefore committed to my Department building upon our existing good working relationships with key stakeholders on the Six Mile Water and Glenavy River. Practical examples include that NIEA has already cooperated with anglers and other key stakeholders on the Six Mile Water (including providing start-up funding) to establish a Six Mile Trust. This Trust has charitable status, meets regularly and has been very successful in allowing local people to play a direct practical role in protecting and improving their river. Likewise anglers on the Six Mile Water have been enthusiastic participants in NIEA's Anglers' Monitoring Initiative, which allows local people to participate directly in NIEA's monitoring programme on their local river.

I trust this reassures you that my Department has for some years carried out an intensive programme of work to address pollution on the Six Mile Water and Glenavy River; and that my officials and I are committed to developing and continuing this work.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment whether the target in Going for Growth to increase milk production is still considered viable.

(AQW 1344/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Going for Growth, the industry led strategy for the long term future of the agri-food industry, was developed around the central vision of growing a sustainable, profitable and integrated agri-food supply chain, focused on delivering the needs of the market. It recognises that the sustainable growth of the sector relies on improving the quality of the Northern Ireland agri-food product, rather than focussing on simply increasing levels of production, particularly in the dairy sector.

Going for Growth does not include a target to increase milk production by volume. Rather it identifies five targets specifically for the dairy sector:

- to grow turnover by 65% to £1.45bn;
- to grow value added by 65% to £142m;
- to grow external sales by 80% to £1.1bn;
- to grow employment by 2% to 2,250 full time equivalents; and
- to grow milk solids by 22% to 195,039 tonnes.

Following the abolition of EU milk quotas in March 2015, there has been a steady period of increased global production which has been coupled with a decrease in demand in key markets, creating oversupply. This together with a number of other factors outside the control of my Department has led to significant reduction in prices and there is no doubt that this has had a significant short term impact on the local dairy sector.

I recognise that many dairy farmers have been experiencing cashflow difficulties in the business during this period of low returns. I intend to meet with the local banks over the coming weeks to discuss what further measures the banks, together with my Department, can take to assist the industry. I will also be working with DEFRA at a national level and also at the European Union level to press for additional support for the dairy sector. I plan to attend the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council meeting on 18 July to press the case for our industry.

My Department will continue to work to build the resilience, efficiency and competitiveness of the sector and to help farmers cope with market volatility in the longer term, so that our industry is better equipped to meet the challenges ahead and also to take advantage of the opportunities that will be available in the future

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of Invest NI attaching social clauses to grants to the milk processing sector which would necessitate demonstrable increase in return to the hard pressed producers.

(AQW 1347/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I understand that Invest NI has given no consideration to attaching social clauses to Letters of Offer for the milk processing sector. As I have stated previously the price farmers receive for their produce and that others pay, at any point in the food supply chain, is a commercial matter and therefore not within my remit.

My Department continues to do what it can to support dairy farmers and mitigate the difficulties they are currently facing. It is welcome that in recent weeks European dairy markets show some signs of a small recovery in prices albeit from a low level. However, it will require a significant increase in producer prices to restore profitability to the sector.

I welcome the European Commission's announcement on 18 July of a further package of measures aimed at addressing the financial difficulties within the agriculture sector. I am considering carefully with DEFRA and my Ministerial counterparts in Scotland and Wales the detail of these measures to determine how they might benefit our farmers. In particular, my officials are examining how NI's share of the UK's allocation could best be used for local measures to address the particular needs of farmers here.

You will be aware that I have already committed my Department to making advance payments to eligible Basic Payment Scheme applicants from October 2016. I welcome Commissioner Hogan's announcement that these payments can now represent 70% of the Basic Payment.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether the Executive or InvestNI will continue to fund the poultry manure processing facility in the Republic of Ireland.

(AQW 2081/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department is committed to finding new and innovative technologies for utilising poultry litter. This is why my officials have been working with the Department for Economy, InvestNI and the Strategic Investment Board on the Sustainable Use of Poultry Litter (SUPL) initiative.

The SUPL Loan Scheme was set up to assist the poultry sector in finding more sustainable ways to utilise poultry litter. The repayable loans are offered at commercial rates, with the maximum loan to any project not exceeding 40% of the capital costs.

The Glenmore Project near Ballybofey in Donegal is one of two projects to receive funding under the SUPL Loan Scheme. The project has a total cost of over £23m, including £9.3m SUPL loan funding. Invest NI has entered into a binding legal agreement to part fund the development this project through the SUPL loan funding, and is committed to honouring this contract.

On completion this facility will have capacity to process 25,000 tonnes of Northern Ireland poultry litter per annum. Construction is currently in progress with the facility on target to become operational in early 2017. Biogas produced at this facility will be transported back to Northern Ireland where it will be used to generate nearly 4MW of competitively priced renewable electricity per annum for manufacturing firms Bombardier and Montupet at locations in Belfast, Newtownards, Newtownabbey and Dunmurry.

The two projects funded under the SUPL initiative will play an important role in helping the poultry sector to address the environmental challenge of finding sustainable outlets for the poultry litter produced in Northern Ireland.

Department for the Economy

Mr Butler asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the recommendations of the Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group.

(AQW 6/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): I am currently considering the recommendations of the Energy And Manufacturing Advisory Group.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the benefits of City Deals; and whether he will work with his Executive colleagues to obtain a City Deal for Derry.

(AQW 110/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The UK Government's City Deals initiative is aimed at providing a number of cities in England and Scotland with greater control in relation to decisions that affect their area.

This is not a matter for my Department and it would be for the Executive as a whole to decide on the merits of pursuing such an approach for cities in Northern Ireland.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the community and voluntary organisations in Fermanagh and South Tyrone that received funding from his Department, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 267/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

1 European Social Fund 2007 – 2013 Northern Ireland

The organisations, in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, to receive funding, during the final 4 years, under the ESF 2007 – 2013 programme are:

Organisation	Project Name
First Steps Women's Centre	Women Towards Greater Education & Employment
South Tyrone Empowerment Programme	Able for work
Fermanagh Rural Community Initiative	ERNE 2

To date the total funding paid to these organisations is £1,214,426.73.

2 European Social Fund 2014 – 2020 Northern Ireland

The community and voluntary organisations, in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, to receive funding under the ESF 2014 – 2020 programme are:

Strand	Organisation	Project Name
Unemployed / Economically Inactive	First Steps Women's Centre	Women Towards Education & Employment
Community and Family Support	Network Personnel	Community and Family Support

To date the total funding paid to these organisations is £162,719.40 for the Unemployed/Economically Inactive strand, and £205,997.74 for the Community and Family Support Strand.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the levels of funding cuts to Ulster University campus at Coleraine; and (ii) the number and type of courses cut.

(AQW 509/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Recurrent grant funding is allocated to each Northern Ireland university as a whole. It is for individual institutions to determine how funding is distributed between individual campuses.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy to detail (i) the total amount of funding given to businesses by Invest NI; and (ii) the total amount given to businesses in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by Invest NI, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 548/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI provides offers to companies requesting support to help grow or develop their business or products. Table 1 details the amount offered to businesses across Northern Ireland in each of the last five financial years.

Table 1: Invest NI Support Offered (2011-12 to 2015-16)

Year	Direct to Business £m
2011-12	67.48
2012-13	100.43
2013-14	119.24
2014-15	167.37
2015-16	73.36

Notes:

- Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects and therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Table 2 below details the amount offered to businesses in the Fermanagh & South Tyrone Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) in each of the last five financial years.

Table 2: Invest NI Support Offered In Fermanagh & South Tyrone PCA (2011-12 to 2015-16)

Year	Direct to Business £m
2011-12	2.75
2012-13	4.68
2013-14	5.79

Year	Direct to Business £m
2014-15	10.76
2015-16	6.71

Notes:

- 1 Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects and therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

In addition to support offered direct to businesses, in the last five years an additional £163m was offered to External Delivery Organisations or universities, towards projects or initiatives that will benefit businesses across the whole of Northern Ireland.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for the Economy how many further education colleges provide autism friendly support including a quiet room and support from a specified autism teacher or support officer.

(AQW 567/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: All further education colleges provide a range of additional support for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities including those with autism. This support can range from discrete provision for those unable to access mainstream further education provision through to technical and individual personal support.

The support provided by colleges for students with autism can include classroom support as well as one to one sessions with lecturers, support workers and study skills advisers. The support is provided by teaching and support staff that have had training and/or experience in working with students on the autism spectrum.

Each further education college also has either a dedicated quiet room or space available on each campus or can facilitate access to such a room where this is required by any student including those with autism.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for the Economy how many Ulster University academic staff employed on a (i) permanent; and (ii) full-time contract basis, were based at Magee College on (a) 1 January 2013; (b) 1 January 2014; (c) 1 January 2015; and (d) 1 January 2016.

(AQW 789/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department does not hold this information.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for the Economy whether he plans to review the parental income thresholds for entitlement to a full student maintenance grant to ensure these are targeted to the students whose families can least afford to make a financial contribution.

(AQW 894/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: A means-tested maintenance grant is available of up to £3,475 for students studying higher education courses. Students with a household income of £19,203 or less are eligible for the full grant of £3,475 and students with household incomes between £19,204 and £41,065 are eligible to a partial grant on a sliding scale basis.

There are currently no plans to review these income thresholds.

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline (i) the global law firms that have set up in Belfast since 2011 and receive departmental funding; and (ii) the amount received by each firm.

(AQW 947/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Since 1st April 2011, global law firm Baker & McKenzie has set up in the Belfast council area. Invest NI has offered £1.47m of support towards the creation of 256 new jobs.

In addition, law firms, Allen and Overy and Herbert Smith have announced further expansions to their Belfast operations, with a total of 167 new jobs. Invest NI offered £1.31m towards these expansions.

Invest NI makes offers of support to companies based on business plans received.

These offers are only paid to businesses once key milestones and targets have been met.

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total number of postgraduate students attending (i) Queen's University, Belfast; and (ii) Ulster University, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 1026/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below details the number of postgraduate students attending Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University in each of the last five years.

Table 1: Postgraduate enrolments at Queen's University, Belfast and Ulster University by institution – 2010/11 to 2014/15

Institution	Academic Year				
	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Queen's University, Belfast	5,840	5,120	4,625	4,950	4,995
Ulster University	5,225	5,820	5,800	5,865	5,510

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 The latest available data are for the 2014/15 academic year.
- 2 The figures relate to actual student numbers.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail how his Department is promoting filming locations used in Game of Thrones as tourist attractions.

(AQW 1093/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Building on Tourism Ireland's unique partnership with producers HBO, a third Game of Thrones campaign, aimed at capitalising on the global success of the hit TV series and highlighting its connections with Northern Ireland, was rolled out in April.

The campaign is timed to coincide with the sixth season of the series and includes:

- a series of 10 intricately carved doors depicting moments inspired by the season (made from the wood of fallen trees at the Dark Hedges) which have been revealed in locations across Northern Ireland as the series unfolds each week
- a set of three special kitchen knives made from a re-imagining of the show's 'Valyrian Steel', which were unveiled by chef Stephen Toman at his Michelin-starred OX restaurant in Belfast
- a series of limited edition Games of Thrones stamps for mail posted in Northern Ireland during the campaign, and
- William Mark Fisher's famous painting 'Landscape with Sheep' copied to include giants and dragons. The new 'artwork' will hang close to the original in the Ulster Museum.

Tourism Ireland is releasing a mixture of short films and images of the campaign elements on social media in ten markets. Last year's campaign generated about five million clicks, likes and shares and reached up to 100 million potential visitors. The campaign is also being rolled out by Tourism NI in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The campaign is directing fans to a special section on Tourism Ireland's international website, Ireland.com, which showcases Northern Ireland locations for the show including the Dark Hedges near Armoy, Tollymore Forest Park, Castle Ward, Pollnagollum Cave in Fermanagh, Ballintoy Harbour and Downhill Beach and Mussenden Temple.

The series locations and a wide range of Game of Thrones tours and experiences are also highlighted on Tourism NI's website, discovernorthernireland.com.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail how the £1.1 million to fund a pilot small business research initiative, allocated under the June Monitoring Round, will be spent.

(AQW 1301/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Executive's Innovation Strategy reinforces the importance of policy interventions, such as SBRI, as a means of driving innovation right across the economy. SBRI allows public bodies to procure research and development (R&D) where there are often no suitable products or services available on the market.

The Executive has made £1.1million available in 2016-17 for an SBRI Challenge Fund to stimulate and develop innovative products and services to meet service priorities. A call for applications from Departments took place in February 2016 and the following five projects were selected for funding:

Lead Department	Project Title	Cost
DAERA	Innovative approaches to remediation of the Mobuoy site and other illegal landfill sites	£400k
DoH	Home Medication for the Elderly to support domiciliary care services	£427K
DoF/Belfast City Council/ Future Cities Catapult	Improving collection of non-domestic rates	£100k
DoH	Automated solution for deployment of pharmacy staff	£78k
DfE/Tourism NI	Real-time Tourism Information	£80k

Lead Department	Project Title	Cost
	Total	£1,085k

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail where the extra £25 million allocated to his Department in the June Monitoring Round will be spent.

(AQW 1303/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The £25 million Resource allocated to my Department in the June Monitoring Round comprises £20 million for the skills agenda and £5 million drawdown from the Further Education End Year Flexibility (EYF) Scheme.

The £25 million is allocated across business areas of the Department for the Economy as follows:

- Higher Education £12 million
- Further Education £8 million (£3million skills agenda and £5million EYF)
- Youth Policy £4 million
- Future Skills £1 million

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his Department's plans to promote tourism in Upper Bann.

(AQW 1304/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Both Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland undertake marketing campaigns throughout the year to market Northern Ireland, including Upper Bann, as a tourism destination.

Tourism Ireland continues to work with tourism businesses in Upper Bann to promote the visitor attractions and holiday experiences of the region overseas. Visitor attractions of Upper Bann are listed on Ireland.com, Tourism Ireland's suite of international websites (29 market sites available in ten language versions), which attracts over 16.6 million unique visitors each year.

Tourism NI continues to promote Northern Ireland to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets through fully integrated marketing campaigns targeted at specific market segments which are based on extensive market research. These campaigns include TV, radio, press, outdoor, promotions and digital marketing. In addition, all activity is underpinned by extensive PR and media relations activity.

Tourism NI remains committed to continuing the support and promotion of the tourism product and experience in the Upper Bann area through these campaigns, and other promotional materials including brochures, and the consumer website.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the training and further education opportunities for young adults with autism in Upper Bann, broken down by provider.

(AQW 1305/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department provides a guaranteed training place on its Training for Success programme for all unemployed young people in the 16-17 year old age group, with extended eligibility up to age 22 for those with a disability (including autism).

The Apprenticeships NI programme is open to all 16 to 24 year olds who are in paid employment, working 21 or more hours per week. Terms and conditions apply for persons aged 25 years and over.

There are five training suppliers contracted to deliver the Training for Success and Apprenticeships NI programmes in the Upper Bann area – Dairy Farm People 1st, Rutledge, Southern Regional College, Hair Academy, and Clanrye (Training for Success only).

Specialist Disability Support Suppliers (Disability Action, Sensory Learning Support, Cedar Foundation and Ulster Supported Employment Limited) are contracted to provide tailored support for participants with disabilities. In particular, Disability Action has partnered with the National Autistic Society to provide support to participants with autism.

Southern Regional College, through mainstream further education provision, also provides training opportunities for students with disabilities, including those with autism. The college makes provision for students who, because of the nature or degree of their disabilities, are unable to participate in mainstream education. This discrete provision typically consists of a mix of work-focused personal development and life-skills courses with training delivered with a higher staff to student ratio than mainstream provision.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail his Department's strategy for ensuring that all households in West Tyrone, including Trillick, Clanabogan, Garvaghy, Eskra, Carrickmore, Creggan and Greencastle will have access to superfast broadband.

(AQW 1393/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department's strategy, "Continuing to Connect - Telecoms 2015- 2017", committed to the completion of the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) and delivery of the Superfast Roll-out Programme (SRP).

BT has completed the build phase of NIBIP and this is now in the operational phase. It was reported at 31 March 2016, that almost 7,100 premises across West Tyrone could now access new broadband services delivered through this project.

This contract with BT has a clawback (gain share) mechanism which compels BT to return part of the investment when adoption of the new service passes beyond the 20% mark in related areas. The final amount will not be known until autumn, when plans can be developed to use any funds owed, to help further improve the coverage of faster broadband connectivity across Northern Ireland.

In addition, my Department is currently managing a contract for the delivery of the SRP which, by 31 December 2017, will provide access to superfast broadband, with speeds of at least 24 Megabits per second (Mbps), to a further 39,000 premises, both business and residential across Northern Ireland, including a number of areas across West Tyrone.

Both projects seek to achieve the best and maximum coverage while ensuring that funding is used as efficiently as possible, taking account of the technical and financial constraints that exist. These constraints are generally based on the existing network and the limitations of the telecommunications equipment.

It is not possible to prioritise specific geographical areas or individual premises, without impacting on the operational delivery of the projects.

It is important to recognise that, where fixed-line broadband is not viable, there are other technology alternatives available, including fixed wireless and satellite. With regard to satellite, a scheme is in place under the auspices of the NIBIP, to allow consumers with a broadband speed less than 2Mbps, to apply for a subsidy towards the cost of installation of satellite broadband, from a list of registered providers, subject to satisfying certain eligibility criteria. Details of the scheme can be found at: www.economy-ni.gov.uk/articles/satellite-broadband-support-scheme-northern-ireland

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will work with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to deliver enterprise units in Fintona.
(AQW 1395/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Fermanagh & Omagh District Council is currently developing a Community Plan for the District. This includes working with partners to develop a proposition that will help drive investment in the area. As part of this process the Community Planning Partnership will be considering all of the needs, challenges and opportunities facing the area, including the need for enterprise units in the District.

Invest NI is a statutory partner in the Community Planning process and is already working closely with the council, providing advice, guidance and economic information.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to outline whether he will bring forward legislation in relation to the Renewable Heat Incentive.
(AQW 1436/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The domestic and non-domestic RHI schemes closed to new applications on 29 February 2016.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of mobile phone coverage in East Derry.
(AQW 1442/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Information on mobile coverage is gathered and published by Ofcom through a number of reports. The information is published at local authority level rather than by constituency. Information related to the local authority areas that would cover the East Londonderry Constituency, taken from 'Connected Nations 2015' is set out in the table below.

Council Area	2G		3G		4G	
	Signal from all operators – premises (%)	Signal from all operators –Geographic (%)	Signal from all operators – premises (%)	Signal from all operators –Geographic (%)	Signal from 3 operators – premises (%)	Signal from 3 operators –Geographic (%)
Causeway Coast and Glens	75.7	55.84	55.11	49.24	11.19	11.21
Londonderry and Strabane	81.87	43	84.09	37.21	84.78	30.42

From these figures, it is clear that more work is required in order to improve the coverage of mobile networks in some of our most rural locations.

The UK Government has put in place an agreement with the Mobile Network Operators through which the mobile industry will invest £5 billion in UK infrastructure and increasing coverage by 2017.

It is envisaged that mobile not-spots in Northern Ireland will be reduced to 0.3% of the land mass by the time this investment is completed.

In addition, the mobile market in the UK is highly competitive and fast moving and the operators are constantly evolving their networks and developing new products and services that can offer better coverage and more adaptable packages.

My Department is keeping a watching brief on these investments in order to determine if further public intervention will be required once they are completed.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will introduce subordinate legislation on the closure of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation before 1 July 2016.

(AQW 1451/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The draft Renewables Obligation Closure (No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 was approved by the Northern Ireland Assembly on 27th June 2016.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the options contained in the consultation on the closure of the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation to new small scale onshore wind.

(AQW 1452/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My assessment of the options is set out in the consultation response which was published on 27 June 2016.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of meetings that Invest NI held with potential foreign direct investors in each month of the last three financial years.

(AQW 1467/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: With Invest NI staff based in offices around the world, holding numerous, and in many cases daily, meetings with potential investors, it is not possible to provide the information requested as this is not centrally held.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for the Economy to outline how he is helping Local Councils to promote and boost social enterprises within their areas.

(AQW 1474/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The transfer of functions from DETI to the 11 Councils took place in April 2015 with a £3.01m budget relating to enterprise awareness, start a business activity and social entrepreneurship. My Department continues to provide guidance in relation to these transferred economic development functions in parallel with Invest NI which, as a Community Planning partner, is engaging with councils on development of their community/economic development plans.

The Department also funds Social Enterprise NI, to design, manage and deliver a Social Economy Work Programme (SEWP). As part of the SEWP Social Enterprise NI works closely with all the councils through their Economic Development Forum and individually across a range of initiatives by providing mentoring sessions, specialist support and accredited and non accredited training opportunities and through promotion of their 'Buy Social' agenda.

In addition the Department, along with Invest NI and the Department for Communities, has also been responsible for establishing the Social Enterprise Hubs across eleven locations as part of the Delivering Social Change Initiative. The hubs are available for use by new or existing social enterprises with a new product or service. They offer mentoring, advice, signposting, training, best practice visits and space (admin or retail) where the social enterprises can test trade.

Finally social enterprises who meet Invest NI eligibility criteria can access Invest NI support through a wide range of financial and non-financial programmes which support the growth and development of Small Medium Enterprise businesses including social enterprises.

My Department will continue to work with local councils to promote and boost social enterprise within their areas.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy what impact electronic cigarette companies have had on the local economy.

(AQW 1481/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Neither my Department nor Invest NI are aware of any impact that electronic cigarettes have had on the local economy.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department has invested in a Coleraine enterprise zone.

(AQW 1484/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: My Department has not invested any funds into the pilot Enterprise Zone in Coleraine, which will focus specifically on offering Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECAs) to potential investors. My Department's role has been to facilitate designation of the Enterprise Zone by HM Treasury so that ECAs can be provided. HM Treasury advised on 15 July that the Statutory Instrument has been laid and it will come into force on 5 August 2016.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy to detail any correspondence he has had with the Chancellor regarding the establishment of an enterprise zone in Coleraine.

(AQW 1485/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have not had any correspondence with the Chancellor regarding the establishment of an Enterprise Zone in Coleraine. However my officials have been liaising with HM Treasury in relation to designation of the pilot Enterprise Zone. HM Treasury advised on 15 July that the Statutory Instrument has been laid and it will come into force on 5 August 2016

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of visits promoted by Invest NI by potential Foreign Direct Investment businesses to each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.
(AQW 1539/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below details the number of visits arranged by Invest NI for potential inward investment businesses to each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14, (ii) 2014/15, and (iii) 2015/16.

Invest NI Inward Investment Visits in Belfast PCAs

PCA	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Belfast East	56	24	42
Belfast North	35	23	40
Belfast South	87	61	112
Belfast West	14	13	14

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for the Economy how many jobs were created in each Belfast constituency, where assistance was provided by Invest Northern Ireland, in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.
(AQW 1540/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Table 1 below details the number of jobs that Invest NI has helped to create in each Belfast constituency, where assistance was provided by Invest Northern Ireland, in (i) 2013/14, (ii) 2014/15, and (iii) 2015/16.

Table 1: Invest NI New Jobs Created in Belfast PCAs

PCA	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Belfast East	870	949	691
Belfast North	346	419	1,231
Belfast South	776	1,143	875
Belfast West	217	387	138

Note: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

It should be noted that 'jobs created' are jobs which have actually been filled at a particular point in time, and may relate to investments secured in earlier years. It is therefore not possible to directly compare the number of jobs created with those that have been promoted during the same period.

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total financial assistance provided by Invest NI to existing businesses in each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.
(AQW 1542/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The table below details the amount of assistance that Invest NI has offered to existing businesses in each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14, (ii) 2014/15, and (iii) 2015/16.

Invest NI Assistance Offered (£m) to Existing Businesses in Belfast PCAs

PCA	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Belfast East	22.07	10.57	3.35
Belfast North	9.96	7.30	3.92
Belfast South	10.44	37.84	5.88
Belfast West	5.42	1.63	0.62

Note: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Invest NI makes offers of support to companies based on business plans received. These offers are only paid to businesses once key milestones and targets have been met.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the mobile phone infrastructure project.
(AQW 1580/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Mobile Infrastructure Project (MIP) was entirely developed, resourced and managed by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). My Department did not therefore have any direct involvement in the project.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for the Economy to detail his Department's efforts to achieve a more balanced regional economy, with particular regard to growing the economy in Omagh and Strabane.
(AQW 1599/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Through the new Programme for Government 2016-2021, the refocus of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy and the work of my Department and Invest NI, I am committed to improving the economic prospects of the whole of Northern Ireland.

On the 27th May the Executive published our draft Programme for Government Framework 2016 -2020 for consultation. The new Programme for Government sets out the ambition the Executive has for our society as a whole.

In parallel with this work the Executive has tasked my Department with leading work on refocusing the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy to take account of the decision taken with respect of the Corporation Tax rate for Northern Ireland as well as the economic indicators and measures set out in the new draft Programme for Government. We will be actively engaging with the councils during the development of the refocused Economic Strategy to set out collective priorities for promoting economic development across all council areas. The refocused Economic Strategy will set out key activities to deliver economic growth across the whole of Northern Ireland.

In relation to support for the areas of Omagh and Strabane, Invest NI has provided support for several important business investments including McColgan's Quality Foods, O'Neills International Sports Company Limited and Terex GB Limited.

My Department and Invest NI have and will continue to engage with all Councils, including Fermanagh and Omagh District Council and Derry City and Strabane District Council, in the development of their economic development plans, to ensure that there is alignment with the PfG and the refocused Economic Strategy.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of mobile phone coverage in Fermanagh and South Tyrone.
(AQW 1659/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Information on mobile coverage is gathered and published by Ofcom through a number of reports. The information is published at local authority level rather than by constituency. Information related to the local authority areas that would cover the Fermanagh and South Tyrone Constituency, taken from 'Connected Nations 2015' is set out in the table below.

Council Area	2G		3G		4G	
	Signal from all operators – premises (%)	Signal from all operators –Geographic (%)	Signal from all operators – premises (%)	Signal from all operators –Geographic (%)	Signal from 3 operators – premises (%)	Signal from 3 operators –Geographic (%)
Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	79.66	64.42	63.56	39.39	11.45	8.06
Fermanagh and Omagh	58.22	45.65	58.79	39.72	31.62	21.83
Mid-Ulster	65.08	45.05	36.22	27.21	3.36	3.41

From these figures, it is clear that more work is required in order to improve the coverage of mobile networks in some of our most rural locations.

The UK Government has put in place an agreement with the Mobile Network Operators through which the mobile industry will invest £5 billion in UK infrastructure and increasing coverage by 2017.

It is envisaged that mobile not-spots in Northern Ireland will be reduced to 0.3% of the land mass by the time this investment is completed.

In addition, the mobile market in the UK is highly competitive and fast moving and the operators are constantly evolving their networks and developing new products and services that can offer better coverage and more adaptable packages.

My Department is keeping a watching brief on these investments in order to determine if further public intervention will be required once they are completed.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy (i) to detail the projects (a) in progress; and (b) scheduled for the future in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by his Department, that have received EU funding or are scheduled to receive EU funding; (ii) for her assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Executive Office or his Department.
(AQW 1828/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) Details of all projects funded in the 2007-2013 period can be viewed at <http://successes.eugrants.org/>

Under the 2014-2020 ERDF Investment in Growth & Jobs Programme, Invest NI has supported 10 businesses within Fermanagh/South Tyrone as follows:

Organisation Name	Scheme
Flynn's Fine Foods Limited	Selective Financial Assistance
JFC Distribution Limited	Selective Financial Assistance
Sean Nugent Engineering Limited	Selective Financial Assistance
Capper Trading Limited	Grant for Research & Development
EMS Environmental Marketing Solutions Ltd	Grant for Research & Development
Mallaghan Engineering Ltd	Grant for Research & Development
CK International Ltd	Grant for Research & Development
OMJ Limited	Grant for Research & Development
Sandvik Construction Mobile Crushers and Screens Limited	Grant for Research & Development
Precision Livestock Measurement Limited	Grant for Research & Development

Separately, the Invest NI Design Advice Service and Development Programmes are delivered through ERDF support. Whilst participants do not directly benefit through funding, seven businesses in the area have availed of this service.

Organisations in the Fermanagh/South Tyrone constituency to receive funding under the ESF 2014 – 2020 programme to date are:

Strand	Organisation	Project Name
Unemployed / Economically Inactive	Fermanagh & Omagh Dist Council	Aspire
	Tyrone Donegal Partnership	Practica
	First Steps Womens Centre	Women Towards Education & Employment
Community and Family Support	Network Personnel	Community and Family Support

- (ii) It is anticipated that the EU Programmes will continue to operate during the UK / EU negotiation period.
- (iii) Future priorities and funding will be the subject of negotiations between the NI Executive and the UK Government, and between the UK Government and the EU institutions.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what discussions he has had, or plans to have, with the Minister for Universities and Science regarding the proposal to replace Innovate UK and the seven research councils with UK Research and Innovation.

(AQW 1986/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I have not yet had the opportunity to meet with the Minister for Universities and Science. However, I have been in correspondence with him regarding UK Research and Innovation, as well as other elements within the Higher Education and Research Bill, and I look forward to meeting him in due course.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the effect on the higher and further education sector of the proposal in the Nurse Review of United Kingdom research councils to create a new body called UK Research and Innovation.

(AQW 1987/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: This new body is intended to strengthen the strategic approach to research by bringing together the functions of the seven Research Councils and InnovateUK, as well as the research and knowledge exchange functions currently exercised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

My Department will continue to liaise with the UK Government and the other Devolved Administrations to ensure that the interests of Northern Ireland are taken into consideration as the associated Higher Education and Research Bill progresses through Westminster.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for the Economy what assurances he can give to stakeholders in his departmental portfolio that they and Northern Ireland will not be disadvantaged as the outcome of the EU Referendum is implemented.

(AQW 2058/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Investors are attracted by the loyalty, talent and hard work of the people in Northern Ireland, along with proximity to North America as well as our lower costs. Many of the major investors attracted over the last few years are primarily servicing the UK and the US, making European market access a non-issue for them.

Belfast is now the number one destination globally for financial technology investments, has been named the world's most business friendly city of its size and is the leading destination in Europe for new software development projects. Northern Ireland is the best performing region in the UK for attracting inward investment on a per capita basis, with a young workforce that is highly skilled. We have world class universities and colleges with a proven track record of working with industry and we have some of the lowest labour and property costs in the western world.

None of these positives are affected by the Referendum vote on 23 June 2016 and the Executive will work to ensure that this continues to be the case.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for the Economy (i) to outline why the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network course in Southern Regional College, Armagh Campus has been reduced from three to two years; (ii) to detail what modules or sections have been removed from the course to facilitate the reduction; and (iii) what consultation took place with all stakeholders prior to this decision.

(AQW 2107/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: As my Department does not hold the information relating to the specific delivery of the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) course in Southern Regional College, officials have contacted the college who have provided information as follows.

Prior to September 2015, Southern Regional College delivered a two year Oxford & Cambridge RSA (OCR) Personal and Social Development programme, followed by a one year ASDAN Employability Programme for students who were 'work ready' and considered suitable to commence a programme more focussed on employment and development of employability skills.

The ASDAN course is therefore not a three year course, rather the College offered a 3 year programme consisting of the two year OCR course followed by the one year ASDAN course.

Following a review of the curriculum during the 2014-15 academic year, the College identified that schools in the catchment area were also delivering the same OCR qualification so pupils could undertake the course at school and progress to the ASDAN course at the College.

At the same time the College added to its curriculum offer a one year ASDAN Personal and Social Development programme, aimed at developing personal, social, health, citizenship and ICT skills as well as preparing the learner for independent living.

Students therefore have two options: the two year Oxford & Cambridge RSA (OCR) Personal and Social Development programme at school followed by the one year ASDAN Employability Programme at the College or the one year ASDAN Personal and Social Development programme followed by the one year ASDAN Employability Programme, both at the College. No modules or sections have been removed from either of the ASDAN courses.

To continue to offer the ORC course in the College would have impacted on its viability for both schools and the College.

Information about the new College programme offering was shared with stakeholders at special schools' open days, College open days and meetings attended by transition officers from the Education Authority and Southern Health and Social Services Trust. All parents and carers have been informed about this two year programme at interviews during 2016.

Department of Finance

Mrs Long asked the Minister of Finance when he intends to bring forward marriage equality legislation.

(AQW 500/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The timetable for equal marriage legislation will be determined by a range of factors, including the availability of drafting resources and the Executive's prioritisation of the legislative initiatives to give effect to the agreed Programme for Government.

Department of Health

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Health whether her Department plans to progress the funding of cancer drugs to ensure equity with the rest of the UK.

(AQW 1088/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): My Department's policy is to locally review all Technology Appraisals for new drugs, published by the National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE), for their applicability and, where appropriate, they are endorsed here. NICE assesses all new specialist drugs for clinical and cost effectiveness. All cancer drugs that have been recommended by NICE for routine use in the NHS are available in the North. However, those drugs which have not been recommended by NICE may be accessed, where clinical exceptionality can be established, via the current Individual Funding Request (IFR) process.

My predecessor established a clinically-led task and finish group to reform the IFR process following public consultation on proposals to improve access to all specialist drugs, including cancer drugs, and introduce greater transparency in the decision making process. The group will report to me this summer and I aim to introduce the new arrangements during 2016/17 on a phased basis subject to available funding.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Cancer Drugs Fund.
(AQW 1295/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's policy is to locally review all Technology Appraisals for new drugs, published by the National Institute for Care Excellence (NICE), for their applicability and, where appropriate, they are endorsed here. NICE assesses all new specialist drugs for clinical and cost effectiveness. All cancer drugs that have been recommended by NICE for routine use in the NHS are available in the North. However, those drugs which have not been recommended by NICE may be accessed, where clinical exceptionality can be established, via the current Individual Funding Request (IFR) process.

My predecessor established a clinically-led task and finish group to reform the IFR process following public consultation on proposals to improve access to all specialist drugs, including cancer drugs, and introduce greater transparency in the decision making process. The group will report to me this summer and I aim to introduce the new arrangements during 2016/17 on a phased basis subject to available funding.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Health whether she will direct Health and Social Care Trusts to delay plans to introduce the method of paying its employees from weekly or fortnightly to monthly until (i) they have consulted with staff and trade unions; and (ii) there has been an impact assessment completed to outline how this change will affect staff.
(AQW 1695/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Following engagement with frontline healthcare workers and unions, I have decided to halt the transition from weekly and fortnightly pay to monthly pay for health and social care staff. The change in pay frequency would have impacted upon some 12,000 staff particularly women on lower pay scales. I have listened to the issues raised by those staff who would have been affected by the change and have decided to retain the current arrangements for weekly and fortnightly paid employees.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the community and voluntary organisations in East Derry that received funding from his Department, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 237/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): In the last five years North Coast Community Transport (NCCT), whose operational area includes both the East Derry and North Antrim constituencies, has received grant funding from my Department to provide Dial a Lift services.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure when his Department will introduce the additional exemption to regulation 10(2) of the Taxis (Taximeters, Devices and Maximum Fares) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 in order to resolve the issue of dead miles.
(AQO 135/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: For clarity, I should perhaps explain to the House that the term "Dead Miles" refers to the mileage undertaken by the taxi driver to get to a job and/or return to base from a job. Under the previous proposals, drivers were only allowed to charge when the passenger was in the car.

To address the issue, the former Department of the Environment made amending regulations in March 2016 which came into operation on 31st May 2016. The regulations allow an exemption on the use of the taximeter where there are excessive dead miles.

The exemption exists when there is an agreement between the passenger and the operator, in advance of the journey, that the distance to be travelled by the taxi, without the passenger, will exceed the distance of the passenger's journey and the passenger waives the right to have the fare calculated by the taximeter and agrees the fare for the journey.

When these conditions have been met, the driver must record a variety of information in writing, such as, the fare agreed, the name of the person whom the booking is made, the date and time of the journey etc. The details must be kept in the taxi for the duration of the journey, and offer a copy of the record to the passenger. It is intended that this exemption will address the issue of taxi supply in rural areas whilst enhancing consumer protection.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to list the new road resurfacing plans for Groomsport in each of the next three financial years.

(AQW 1893/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that my Department's TransportNI has no planned road resurfacing schemes for Groomsport in 2016/17.

As funding levels for 2017/18 and 2018/19 have not been determined I cannot commit to any schemes at this time.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 September 2016

Written Answers to Questions

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to provide a copy of her departmental bid in the June monitoring round for (i) Capital DEL; and (ii) Resource DEL.
(AQW 2082/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): As indicated in the Finance Minister's June Monitoring statement, we are now in a different environment, particularly with the introduction of an official opposition. Therefore processes have changed. The more streamlined Executive, working to a common purpose, is able to determine relative priorities in departments and agree allocations on this basis.

The new approach allows for an objective assessment of genuine pressures across departments. It is more appropriate that the focus should be on what the outcome of the monitoring round means for public services.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether her Department is considering a ban on the use of microbeads in cosmetics and other household products.
(AQW 2399/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: On 3 September 2016 Defra Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom, announced plans to ban the sale and manufacture of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads in the UK. The intention is that the ban will extend to Northern Ireland.

Staff in DAERA will be part of a UK-wide project to bring forward the ban. The project will be led by Defra and will include staff from the other Devolved Administrations.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how she will ensure a dedicated budget to fund the Tackle Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework until 2021.
(AQW 2427/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework, entitled 'Supporting Rural Communities', was launched in March 2016 and will support initiatives to address the three key TRPSI Framework priorities of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation from 2016 onwards. An opening budget of £4m was allocated to fund the TRPSI Programme for the 2016/17 financial year.

Once the Executive agrees the parameters for the Budget 2016 exercise, my Department will firm up our proposals for all programmes including this one.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on (i) the measures to be delivered through the TRPSI framework 2016-2020; and (ii) progress on the actions and initiatives contained in the 2016-17 TRPSI Action Plan.
(AQW 2428/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The new Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) Framework, entitled 'Supporting Rural Communities', was launched in March 2016 and will support initiatives to address the three key TRPSI Framework priorities of access poverty, financial poverty and social isolation.

An Action Plan outlining initiatives to be developed and supported during Year 1 of the new Framework was also launched. Progress on the action plan delivery is set out in the table below.

Priority / Measure	Initiative	Progress
Access Poverty – Promote Fair and equitable access to key services for all rural dwellers	Assisted Rural Travel Scheme (ARTS)	On-going – 68,000 passenger trips funded up to end of July.
	Maximising Access in Rural Areas (MARA)	On-going – 1,200 MARA visits completed this year to date.
	Farm Family Health Checks	On-going – 1,071 individuals screened to date.
	Rural Broadband	Delivery on-going.
	Community Sports Facilities	Scheme under development.
Financial Poverty – Maximise Household incomes	SUSE+ (Step Up to Sustainable Employment)	Ongoing - 304 rural people have participated in SUSE+ up to end of June.
	RYE Connect (Rural Youth Entrepreneurship)	Ongoing –, 78 young rural participants have attended workshops with 65 going on to complete a Business Action Plan at the end of June
	Rural Business Start Scheme	Scheme opened for application 5 September 2016.
Social Isolation – Promote tolerance, health, well-being and inclusion for rural dwellers	Rural Support Helpline	Ongoing - Support provided to 47 farmers / farm families up to the end of June.
	Social Farming Support Service	Ongoing – 29 individuals benefited from Social Farming taster sessions up to the end of June.
	Social Farming Capital Grant Scheme	Programme will open in October 2016.
	Rural Community Development	Delivery on-going.
	Rural Micro Capital Grant Scheme	Scheme opened for applications on 5 September 2016.
	Community Halls	Scheme under development.
	Rathlin Harbour Refurbishment	On site. Expected completion date mid October 2016.
	Forkhill Greenspace Development	Contractor expected on site November 2016. Expected completion date March 2017

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether an impact assessment was completed on the likely effect the proposed commercial ferry and associated works at Greencastle, Carlingford Lough would have on Greencastle Oysters Limited.

(AQW 2460/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A full Environmental Impact Assessment has been completed, which considered the likely effect on Greencastle Oysters Ltd. RPS completed an Environmental Statement on behalf of the applicant. My Department has considered this both as a consultee to the planning process and as licensing authority under the marine licensing processes.

The shellfish harvesting areas that are licensed to Greencastle Oysters Ltd are within Carlingford Lough Shellfish Water Protected Area and full consideration was given to this through the EIA and consenting processes.

As a result a strict Water (NI) Order consent has been issued to ensure the protection of the shellfishery. There is a further marine licence condition to manage any potential risk from suspended solids both during construction and operation.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the percentage, by weight or volume, of materials collected in blue recycle bins from domestic, commercial and industrial sources which ends up as landfill rather than being processed and recycled, broken down by each District Council.

(AQW 2484/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department only collects such data for Local Authority collected municipal wastes (LACMW).

The information below has been taken from the latest fully validated data, which covers the financial year 2014-2015(relating to the previous 26 local councils).

Council Area	Co-mingled kerbside LACMW ¹ collected for recycling but sent to landfill as a % of all co-mingled kerbside LACMW1 collected for recycling (% w/w 2014/15 validated data)
Antrim	0
Ards	0
Armagh	No co-mingled collections
Ballymena	No co-mingled collections
Ballymoney	13
Banbridge	5
Belfast	0
Carrickfergus	No co-mingled collections
Castlereagh	0
Coleraine	19
Cookstown	0
Craigavon	14
Londonderry	22
Down	0
Dungannon & S Tyrone	0
Fermanagh	0
Larne	0
Limavady	15
Lisburn	0
Magherafelt	14
Moyle	19
Newry & Mourne	11
Newtownabbey	No co-mingled collections
North Down	0
Omagh	0
Strabane	16

1 LACMW is Local Authority Collected Municipal Waste

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in light of recent media reports of major safety concerns at Sellafield, to detail the steps he has taken to ensure the protection and safety of local residents, specifically on the east coast.

(AQW 2515/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) has a comprehensive environmental monitoring programme to assess the impact of radioactive discharges from nuclear installations in GB, including Sellafield, on the Northern Ireland coastline. The programme includes checks on the radiation levels on the coastline at approximately 50 locations around Northern Ireland as well as monitoring the levels of radioactivity in seawater, seaweed, shellfish and fish.

The results of the programme are published annually in a joint report "Radioactivity in Food and the Environment" published by Scottish Environmental Protection Agency, Environment Agency, Natural Resource Wales, Food Standard Agency and NIEA. Results indicate that food produced in Northern Ireland is safe and that exposure of the Northern Ireland public to radiation from nuclear discharges is negligible. The 21st RIFE report, containing results from 2015, is due to be published in October and shows comparable monitoring data results to previous years.

The UK has a radiation monitoring and emergency response network to detect increases in background levels of radiation. Any evidence of a nuclear incident of radiological significance for the UK would result in the appropriate action plans being undertaken.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the proposed trail network in Gortin Glens Forest Park.
(AQW 2559/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Forest Service is committed to working in partnership with local government and other organisations to secure a wide range of recreational facilities and attractions for the benefit of the local communities and visitors to forests across Northern Ireland. This includes facilitating viable proposals to deliver a range of recreation products including walking and cycling trail networks.

In continuation of this work, my officials in Forest Service are liaising closely with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council providing forest information and access to Gortin Glen Forest Park, and will continue to liaise closely with the council on any proposals they develop.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of coastal erosion at Magilligan.
(AQW 2566/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The coast forms part of a highly dynamic system. As such, it will be subject periodically to the natural process of coastal erosion. This is particularly true of sandy beaches and dune systems, which are a feature around Magilligan.

You will know that my Department's specific coastal management responsibilities are in relation to marine licensing and nature conservation protection. It has no responsibility for the coastal erosion risk management function. No department has that function currently.

However, I have met with Chris Hazzard MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, to discuss the way forward for the Coastal Forum, which I established in my previous role as the Minister for Regional Development. Its aim is to address the issues around coastal management in a strategic way – in particular, coastal erosion. We have agreed to co-Chair its meetings.

It has been accepted by the Coastal Forum that there is a need for completion of a robust scientific evidence base on coastal processes around Northern Ireland. I expect this to be one of the key workstreams that the Coastal Forum will help to deliver.

I will continue to work closely with Chris Hazzard MLA, Minister for Infrastructure, on this issue.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the fish kill in Claudy.
(AQW 2567/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) was first alerted to this incident on Monday 1 August by a member of the public who had noted a sour smell and foaming downstream of Claudy. NIEA staff were tasked to the area to investigate and concluded that some form of agricultural effluent had entered the river although no actual source could be found that evening. The investigation continued the next morning during which time a report was made to NIEA of dead fish in the river above Claudy.

Approximately two miles of the Faughan River was impacted stretching from the Killycor Bridge to Dungorkin Bridge with around 2000 fish being killed including salmon, sea trout, lamprey and eels.

The Faughan is used to provide drinking water to Londonderry and NIEA staff alerted Northern Ireland Water to the incident during the early stages of the investigation to allow them to take appropriate action.

The Loughs Agency is in the process of compiling a prosecution file in relation to this incident and it would therefore be inappropriate for me to comment any further at this stage.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline her Department's policy on the building of residential property in areas of outstanding natural beauty.
(AQW 2569/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: My Department does not have any specific policy on the building of residential property in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Responsibility for central government planning functions, such as regional planning policy, transferred from the former Department of the Environment (DOE) to the new Department for Infrastructure in May 2016. Current planning policy in these regards is found within the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS), Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Development Plans which were published by the former DOE.

Under the Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 2015 (as amended) a council does not have to consult the Department in relation to impacts on AONBs before determining an application for planning permission. However my Department does provide consultation advice should it be sought for applications that are likely to have regionally significant impacts on the landscape and visual amenity of AONBs.

Under the reformed planning system the policies in PPSs will be superseded by policies in new Local Development Plans (LDP) that are prepared and adopted by each individual Council. The Department will continue to encourage local policy development that maintains the outstanding landscape quality of our AONBs.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (i) for her assessment of the impact Brexit will have on fishing quotas; and (ii) when her Department will provide guidance on the issue to fishermen.
(AQW 2621/16-21)

Miss McIlveen:

- (i) New arrangements will need to be negotiated between the UK, the EU and other coastal states to manage fishing opportunities and access to resources. The trading and support framework that will apply to the fisheries sector following a UK withdrawal from the European Union will be the subject of negotiation.

I have already held a series of meetings with both Ministers from the UK government and Devolved Administrations as well as with our own stakeholders to consider the potential implications of Brexit. The meetings included discussions on the need to ensure that future trade and policy frameworks take account of the importance of Northern Ireland's agri-food and fishing industries, rural communities and environment sector.

I intend to be closely and directly involved in the domestic agricultural, environmental, fisheries, and trade policy agendas as they unfold in order to maximise the opportunities that will come from leaving the European Union.

- (ii) It is too early in the process to be in a position to give guidance to the fishing industry on this matter. Until such times as any new arrangements are negotiated and take effect, business will continue as usual.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the amount of European Union funding the agricultural industry has received in the last five years.

(AQW 2627/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The amount of European Union funding which the agricultural industry has received in the last five years is £1,476m. The table below details funding by financial year.

Year	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	Total £'000
EU Funding	314,763	285,302	317,626	299,998	258,567	1,476,256

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail how many applications were received for the Young Farmers Scheme.

(AQW 2653/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: A total of 744 new applications were received for the Young Farmers' Payment in 2016.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the export of fifth quarter pork products to China.

(AQW 2700/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I understand the significant value the lucrative Chinese market can offer to our pig industry and assure you that I have used every lever available to progress these lengthy trade negotiations.

I recently met with the Chinese Consul General for Northern Ireland, Madam Wang and with the Director of the NI Bureau in Beijing and have also had discussions with industry representatives about the export of pork and pork products to China.

You have asked specifically about the export of 'fifth quarter' products.

While trotters are not classified per se as 'fifth quarter' products within the European Union they are viewed by exporters as such and have been excluded from export to China by the Certification and Accreditation Administration of the People's Republic of China (CNCA).

Negotiations to include trotters for export are continuing and I am also pressing for the inclusion of the other excluded 'fifth quarter' products. However, these will not be prioritised by the Chinese authorities until we have gained full approval by the CNCA for Northern Ireland Plants.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the consultation on addressing dilapidated / dangerous buildings.

(AQW 2701/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The consultation on dilapidated/dangerous buildings and neglected sites closed on 30 June 2016 and elicited 24 responses, 23 of which explicitly supported the introduction of a new Assembly Bill providing for enhanced powers for Councils.

A synopsis of responses has been prepared by officials and will be circulated in the first instance to Executive colleagues and AERA Committee members, with subsequent publication on the Department's website. Officials will continue to consider a range of legal and technical issues raised in the consultation responses with a view to seeking Executive approval to final policy proposals in due course.

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on (i) her recent visit to Kilkeel harbour; and (ii) the infrastructure support her Department is providing for the harbour.
(AQW 2702/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I took the opportunity to visit the 3 Fishery Harbours of Ardglass, Kilkeel and Portavogie on 9th August to meet with fishing industry representatives and the NI Fishery harbour Authority. The Kilkeel Strategic Partnership gave me a presentation on its proposals for the development of Kilkeel harbour and took me on a brief boat trip to get a first hand impression of the scale of those proposals and see the approaches to the harbour.

My colleague, Simon Hamilton, Minister for the Economy has recently asked officials to carry forward work on the Kilkeel Infrastructure Project and interested parties including the Kilkeel Strategic Partnership, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council, Invest NI and DAERA have met and agreed how to progress the first phase of this work to examine the risks associated with the proposals. This phase is estimated to cost in the region of £50,000 and my Department will be contributing to these costs.

The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund is now open for applications and my Department has made provision of some €3.3m of the total budget available for projects which focus on maintaining, and/or improving, safety of operations around fishing harbours for delivery over the next 4-5 years. The EMFF is not, however, designed to accommodate large scale infrastructure investments such as those proposed by the Kilkeel Strategic Partnership.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail what additional resources her Department has received to enable it to administer the EU Dairy Aid Scheme.
(AQW 2813/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The European Commission Farm Support Package announced at the AGRIFISH Council meeting on 18 July 2016 has 5 key elements which include €150m for an EU-wide Milk Production Reduction Aid Scheme and €350m for Exceptional Adjustment Aid to fund measures at Member State level to foster economic sustainability of farms and contribute to market stabilisation.

The EU Milk Production Reduction Aid Scheme is being administered by the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) on behalf of all regions within the UK. There are no separate aid allocations for individual Member States or regions. I have already announced that our dairy farmers can now voluntarily apply for this aid, should it suit their particular business needs. The first application period closes on 21 September 2016.

I have successfully made the case for a significant share of the UK's €30.2m allocation of Exceptional Adjustment Aid and am pleased to tell you that Defra Minister George Eustice proposes to allocate €4.8m to Northern Ireland. I am currently considering how best to use our share of this aid to address the particular needs of our farmers and will announce my plans at the earliest opportunity.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for an update on the composition and work programme of the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy.
(AQW 2870/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The Inter Departmental Committee on Rural Policy (IDCRP) was set up a number of years ago to bring forward the Rural White Paper, Rural Proofing and Rural Champion concepts. Following the restructuring of government departments, my department is reviewing the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy and how it could complement the commencement of the Rural Needs Act (NI).

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any recent discussions she has had in relation to replacing the Basic Payment Scheme.
(AQO 290/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Over recent weeks and months I have held discussions with David Davis, Andrea Leadsom, George Eustace and James Brokenshire on Brexit. During the course of those discussions, I highlighted the priorities for the Northern Ireland farming sector. Discussions are still at an early stage and as these develop I will be pushing for the best deal possible for farmers in Northern Ireland.

I welcome the fact that Treasury has given a firm commitment to maintain current levels of CAP support to farmers out to 2020. This removes much uncertainty and creates time in which to develop a new approach to domestic agricultural support.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how many applicants for the Basic Payment Scheme who were turned down under the active farmer definition are still awaiting a decision on their appeal.
(AQO 287/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: The introduction of the Basic Payment Scheme included a requirement that the Department ensures that payments are made to active farmers. It is entirely appropriate that agricultural subsidy is directed towards productive farmers. My Department developed a rigorous assessment process to enable this requirement to be fulfilled. 883 Stage One Review of Decisions applications were received in respect of 2015 Active Farmer decisions. 248 of these have been completed. This leaves 635 outstanding.

The Department has increased the number of Case Officers within the Stage One Review of Decisions team to deal with the unprecedented level of review applications submitted in respect of the 2015 schemes. A dedicated team of technical advisors has also been established to provide guidance to the Case Officers on active farmer issues.

Reviews are processed in strict order by date. The outstanding active farmer cases will be processed in line with Stage One Review procedures.

Staff are dealing with complex evidence in these active farmer cases, and it is not possible to provide time frames for completion of reviews, given the nature of the processes involved and given that no two cases are the same in their complexity and depth of assessment.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to outline any discussions her officials are undertaking with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government regarding its proposed new legislation on the recovery and disposal of waste tyres.

(AQO 288/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Officials from my Department attend the Tyres Working Group which was established by the former Department of Environment, Communities and Local Government and is now led by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The Working Group meets approximately every 3 months to take forward proposals for a full Producer Responsibility Scheme for used tyres in Ireland.

The purpose of officials from my Department attending this working group is to engage in discussions to better understand the impact of the Republic of Ireland proposals on Northern Ireland and to help explore the potential for a similar scheme here.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for her assessment of the challenges posed by Her Majesty's Government using the Barnett Formula as a basis for distributing the Basic Payment Scheme, after the United Kingdom exits the European Union.

(AQO 289/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: UK CAP expenditure has been distributed to UK regions on the basis of the proportion of subsidies received by each region under the coupled payment regime which existed prior to 2004. These shares were maintained when Single Farm Payment was introduced in 2005 and again following the CAP reforms in 2013. I believe that the current distribution reflects the relative importance of the agricultural sector in each UK region.

The Barnett Formula is used by the Treasury to distribute increases in Government expenditure in England, to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland chiefly on the basis of regional population shares. It applies to most but not all Government expenditure.

There has been no suggestion that UK Government expenditure replacing CAP monies should be allocated on the basis of the Barnett Formula. Population shares do not reflect the importance of agriculture in each region and therefore using the Barnett Formula would be unfair not just to Northern Ireland but also to Scotland and Wales.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs how much funding has been allocated to community groups through the Challenge Fund.

(AQO 291/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: Over £4.6 million of Carrier Bag Levy revenue has been issued through the Challenge Fund since its inception in 2011 and almost 600 environmental projects have been completed across the breadth of Northern Ireland.

Of this approximately £4 million has gone to over 300 Community Groups to deliver around 450 projects.

The programme enabled communities and schools, at a grass roots level, to become engaged in the enhancement of our shared environment through the delivery of local environmental projects. These have included a diverse range of projects that have helped wildlife, created green spaces, provided learning experiences and cleaned up the local environment.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs whether she plans to introduce a ban on microbeads.

(AQO 292/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: "Microbeads" are tiny pieces of plastic used as an exfoliating or scrubbing agent in products such as facial cleansers, shower gels, toothpastes and other household products which are sold around the world.

It is not within the legislative competence of the Northern Ireland Assembly to ban the use of this product.

On 3 September 2016 Defra Environment Secretary, Andrea Leadsom, announced plans to ban the sale and manufacture of cosmetics and personal care products containing microbeads in the UK. It is intended that the ban will extend to Northern Ireland.

This action builds on voluntary measures taken by the industry to address the problem. Colgate-Palmolive phased out the use of microbeads in 2014, while both Unilever and Boots phased out their usage in 2015 and L'Oreal had planned a total group phase out by 2020.

Officials in my Department will work with Defra and the other Devolved Administrations to develop more detailed proposals and legislation which will be agreed across Government.

I am content to support the proposed ban and welcome the opportunity to say so publicly.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Minister for Infrastructure regarding improving access arrangements for the Balmoral Show.

(AQO 293/16-21)

Miss McIlveen: I am looking forward to my first Balmoral Show as Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, in 2017.

Since coming into office, I have had a number of discussions with the Minister for Infrastructure on a range of issues.

I am hopeful that with further development of Balmoral Park, the road infrastructure will also be addressed so that accessibility to Balmoral Show will be improved for both exhibitors and visitors.

Department for Communities

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities to detail the budget that the Irish Football Association allocated for the recent European Championships; and how this compared to actual expenditure.

(AQW 2324/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities): I can advise that my Department does not have details of the budget that the Irish Football Association allocated for the recent European Championships. The allocation of the budget for participating in the tournament and the actual expenditure are a matter for the Irish Football Association.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities how he plans to assist women affected by the Pension Act 1995 and the Pension Act 2011.

(AQW 2347/16-21)

Mr Givan: Both the Pensions Act 1995 and the Pensions Act 2011 and corresponding Northern Ireland legislation made a number of changes to the pension system, for example, to give better protection for scheme members, provide for equal pension age for men and women, and to ensure the sustainability of the State pension system and the successful implementation of automatic enrolment of workers into a pension scheme.

I am very conscious that some women feel that they have been treated unfairly by the changes to State Pension age. The equalisation of State pension ages for men and women was announced in 1993 and legislated for in the Pensions (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The proposals to equalise and increase State pension ages received considerable coverage in both the local and national media. For example, in 2001 Minister Morrow launched a pensions education campaign to encourage people to plan for their retirement. Advertisements ran on television and across consumer magazines and national newspapers. In subsequent years, information has been made available through a variety of sources including State pension forecasts, websites and direct mailing.

A substantial concession worth over £1billion across the United Kingdom was made in 2011 meaning that no one faces an increase to their State pension age of more than 18 months, relative to the 1995 timetable. There are no plans to provide further transitional protection.

However, any woman affected by the pension age changes will have access to the full range of working age benefits and support until she reaches pension age.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities whether he has any plans to adopt the Herdman's Mill site in Sion Mills.

(AQW 2364/16-21)

Mr Givan: You will be aware from my letter to you of 27 August 2016 that my officials have been in contact with Derry City and Strabane District Council, which has the powers under Section 161 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 to serve an Urgent Works Notice 'where it appears to a council that works are urgently necessary for the preservation of.... a listed building in its district'. These powers are for urgent works and are intended to cover emergency repairs - for example works to keep a building wind and weatherproof and safe from collapse, or action to prevent vandalism or theft.

The council has also been trying to work with the owner to secure the site and protect the Mill from further damage. In addition, I understand that Council officers have visited the Herdman's Mill site, following the recent fire, to assess the situation and consider appropriate actions.

My Department has the power, under the Planning Act, to compulsorily purchase a listed building, if it appears to the Department that reasonable steps are not being taken for properly preserving it. Guidance explains that the Department has always sought willing partners in the voluntary sector as a prerequisite for such action. Such partners need to be willing to take on responsibility for the building, and have the advantage over a government organisation to access grant aid from various sources. In the case of Herdman's Mill, no organisation to date has been able or willing to take this on.

My officials recognise the significance of the building, and continue to engage with the local council and other interested parties to secure the future for this important listed building.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Communities to detail the funding available for community groups to carry out improvement works to housing estates.

(AQW 2383/16-21)

Mr Givan: Under its programmes to tackle deprivation - the Neighbourhood Renewal, Areas at Risk and Small Pockets of Deprivation initiatives - my Department is also able to make grants to community groups to deliver a range of activities that meet local need, including in housing estates. Over £18.5m has been committed in contracts for funding for such activity in the current financial year.

In addition the Housing Executive has a total Community Grant Funding budget of £210,000. This is used for building capacity within community groups to encourage residents to take pride in their estate and ensure effective local engagement using a community-led approach.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities what assurances he can give that he will include specific commitments to protecting the rights of Irish language speakers and to promoting the Irish language and culture within the Programme for Government.

(AQW 2393/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Northern Ireland Executive has agreed an outcomes' based approach to its Programme for Government Framework 2016-21 (the Framework). My Department is developing, in consultation with key stakeholders, a Delivery Plan for each of the indicators on which my Department is taking the lead.

The Executive Office intends to consult further on these Delivery Plans and everyone will have an opportunity to give their views on how we could work together to achieve the agreed outcomes.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities why his Department did not provide financial assistance to this year's cultural festival in Trillick, County Tyrone.

(AQW 2394/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Trillick Arts and Cultural Society did receive funding from my Department's Community Festivals Fund for its three day cultural festival in August 2016. The Fund is administered by local Councils. The festival was awarded £642.50 in DfC funding, which was match funded by Fermanagh and Omagh District Council.

The group also applied to the Arts Council's Lottery funded Small Grants Programme in relation to this festival, however, in a highly competitive funding round, the group's application did not achieve a high enough score to be awarded funding.

It may be useful for the group to arrange to receive feedback on its application from the Arts Council Assessing Officer to inform any future applications.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities, since the introduction of the Statutory House Sale Scheme, (i) whether there has been any flexibility made to allow a person to purchase a bungalow when their tenancy date was after 1 September 2002; (ii) if so, what was the criteria for allowing the flexibility; (iii) how many times has this been allowed; and (iv) in which areas did this occur.

(AQW 2438/16-21)

Mr Givan: The House Sales Scheme is a statutory scheme (under the provisions of Article 3 of the Housing (NI) Order 1983 as inserted by Article 96 of the Housing (NI) Order 1992). The Housing Executive has advised that there is no flexibility available to allow a person to purchase a bungalow when their tenancy date was after 1 September 2002.

Consequently as the legislation allows no flexibility, no criteria exist and none has been applied in any area.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities whether he has any plans to review the qualifying conditions for the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 2439/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme completed its first full year of operation in March 2016. To qualify for the scheme a household must have an annual gross income of less than £20,000. As part of a broad review of the Affordable Warmth Scheme being undertaken by my Department, officials have engaged with a wide range of stakeholders to seek views on the effectiveness of the scheme. Among other things the review is examining the income threshold level and if, for example,

disability benefits should be excluded from the income calculation. I expect the review to come forward with recommendations later in 2016 and any changes I make to the scheme will come into operation from April 2017.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Communities to outline how his Department is supporting art exhibitions in East Derry.
(AQW 2445/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is not currently supporting any art exhibitions in East Londonderry. However, any group wishing to apply for funding to help with art exhibition costs could apply for funding to the Arts Council's Small Grants Programme, which is open on a rolling basis for awards from £500 to £10,000.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities whether he will reverse his Department's plans to remove Social Security Agency posts in Omagh.
(AQW 2448/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am committed to ensuring that the Department continues to be a regional organisation delivering face to face services from a network of local offices, including the Omagh Jobs and Benefits office, as they will be at the core of the delivery of the new Universal Credit Service.

However, the abolition of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans will result in the closure of the existing Social Fund processing and telephony support units, including the centre in Omagh Jobs & Benefit office.

The new Discretionary Support Service Centres at Antrim and Dungannon were selected following a review of the existing accommodation and infrastructure available in each Jobs & Benefits/Social Security Office. The Omagh office did not meet the criteria developed to identify the sites which would best meet the needs of the new service.

By locating one of the centres in Dungannon it will ensure that staff from surrounding offices, including Omagh, will not have to travel unreasonable distances to work.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the current social housing waiting list in West Tyrone; and (ii) the amount of those in housing stress.
(AQW 2452/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can advise you that as of 30 June 2016, there are currently 1,366 applicants on the social housing waiting list in West Tyrone. Of these 553 are considered to be in housing stress.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Communities whether his Department provides medical information to sports clubs in relation to concussion.
(AQW 2453/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department does not provide medical information in relation to concussion, however, in conjunction with the Department of Education we have produced guidance on concussion. The 'Recognise and Remove' campaign leaflets and posters were distributed to all school children in year 6 upwards and to all sports governing bodies and sports clubs. The leaflet was also made available in Libraries and leisure centres.

The key message of that campaign is that concussion can be fatal, so everyone needs to know the signs. It is important to recognise it and to be aware of the potential consequences, so that prompt and appropriate action is taken. Guidance is available on the Sport Northern Ireland website.

Sport Northern Ireland has established a Concussion Forum of key stakeholders. The Forum includes representatives from Rugby, GAA, Boxing, the medical profession and Departmental officials with the aim of ensuring key messages regarding concussion are and will continue to reach those engaged in sport.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1510/16-21, to outline the rationale, in relation to value for money, in providing Social Housing Enterprise Awards to extend an organisation's childcare service, when the organisation is already in receipt of funding from the Bright Start scheme to extend its childcare provision.
(AQW 2455/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that when they consider awarding funding through the Social Housing Enterprise scheme various checks are conducted:

- On the application form, the organisations applying are asked "Have you received or applied for any other funding or other resources including in-kind support for your initiative? If so please provide details".
- A further search is also made on the Government database for other sources of funding and for large awards, as well as requesting business plans including the assessment of full financial details.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Communities, pursuant to AQW 1510/16-21, to outline the rationale, in relation to value for money, in providing Neighbourhood Renewal funding for salaries and running costs associated with the provision of childcare when the organisation is already in receipt of Pathway Funding from the Department of Education.

(AQW 2456/16-21)

Mr Givan: In order to provide maximum service delivery many organisations seek alternative sources of funding including Neighbourhood Renewal funding to cover separate aspects of their service delivery.

All applications received for Neighbourhood Renewal support are required to advise of any other funding and its impact to enable the Department to satisfy itself that there is no duplication of funding. All requested amounts for salaries and running costs in each NR application are compared against recognised benchmarks to ensure that they represent value for money for the objectives and outputs which they will deliver for the project.

On a case by case basis each application is subject to a thorough assessment and appraisal process in line with the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation and Managing Public Money NI.

Should you require any further detail regarding Pathway Funding you should contact the Minister for the Department of Education.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities (i) for an update on the proposed development of Queens Parade, Bangor; and (ii) to outline the timeline for the demolition of derelict houses on King Street.

(AQW 2459/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Queen's Parade development is a major comprehensive development scheme and significant progress has been made since my Department stepped in and took direct control of the scheme. My Department obtained planning approval in March 2015 for a mixed use scheme that would provide for in excess of 25,000 square metres of floor space. My officials are currently working with Ards and North Down Borough Council to finalise the development brief and this will be presented to Council members shortly for their endorsement on the way ahead.

Developer responses to the Development Brief will then be assessed during January 2017. This assessment will include evaluating the proposed development programmes submitted for the entire Queen's Parade scheme including King Street.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the uptake target for the Warm Homes Scheme.

(AQW 2491/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Warm Homes Scheme ended on 31st March 2015 and was replaced by the Affordable Warmth Scheme. In its first year of operation, 2015/2016, the Affordable Warmth Scheme improved the energy efficiency of 3,057 low income households.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the uptake target for the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 2492/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department for Communities supports a range of schemes to improve the energy efficiency of households across Northern Ireland. The Affordable Warmth Scheme targets households most at risk of fuel poverty and provides a range of energy efficiency improvement measures including loft and cavity wall insulation, heating systems and replacement windows. The scheme is currently investing on average over £4,000 per household on energy efficiency improvements. The current budget for the Affordable Warmth Scheme for 2015/16 is £15.5m and it is anticipated that this will improve the energy efficiency of about 3,800 homes in this financial year.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) the criteria to avail of the Affordable Warmth Scheme; (ii) the target areas; and (iii) how they were selected.

(AQW 2493/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme is an area based targeted scheme aimed at owner occupiers and those who rent from a private sector landlord. In order to qualify for the scheme the household must have a total gross annual income of less than £20,000.

A tailor-made targeting tool was developed and tested for identifying households in severe fuel poverty. It aimed to find small areas of Northern Ireland (around 150 households in size) where most households are likely to be in fuel poverty, and a sizeable proportion of these are likely to be in extreme fuel poverty. It uses more than a dozen databases to calculate likelihoods in these small areas, and these include:

- housing quality data;
- estimates of income and benefit dependency;
- prevailing oil and gas prices;
- prevailing temperatures;
- demographic vulnerability profiles.

Subsequent validation of the accuracy of this targeting tool was based on detailed survey data from more than 2,100 homes across all of Northern Ireland. The validation assessment indicated that:

- the tool was able to identify small areas in which 89% of all households were in fuel poverty;
- 38% were in extreme fuel poverty.

The data indicates that the accuracy of targeting resources towards those most in need has been considerably enhanced by the application of this approach to targeting those in fuel poverty by my Department.

Following successful pilot testing in 2012 and 2013 the targeting tool was used to identify addresses in each council area most likely to be at risk of fuel poverty and ranked these in order of severity. These ranked lists were provided to councils and they have been engaged in a programme of visiting and surveying the households to assess eligibility and work with colleagues in the Housing Executive to improve the energy efficiency of the homes.

The targeting tool proved to be very effective in identifying households most at risk of fuel poverty during the pilot phases of Affordable Warmth and evidence from the first full year of operation of the scheme confirms that the targeting tool is effective in identifying homes in real need of help.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the administration cost for the Warm Homes Scheme; (ii) how many households have availed of the scheme in each year; and (iii) the cost to provide the scheme in each year since its inception. **(AQW 2494/16-21)**

Mr Givan: The total administration cost for the Warm Homes Scheme since its inception in 2009 was £14.6m. A total of 52,882 homes received energy efficiency improvement measures.

The table below outlines the number of households that have availed of the scheme in each year and also the cost to provide the scheme in each year:

	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	Total
Number of homes availed of Warm Homes Scheme	7,075	10,369	10,651	9,755	8,019	7,013	52,882
Cost to provide Warm Homes Scheme	£7.972m	£12.639m	£13.869m	£18.395m	£13.925m	£13.109m	£79.909m

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the administration cost for the Affordable Warmth Scheme; (ii) how many households have availed of the scheme in each year; and (iii) the cost to provide the scheme in each year since its inception.

(AQW 2495/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The Administration costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Councils in connection with the Affordable Warmth Scheme to 31 August 2016 were £9.5m. These include start up and IT costs for the start of the new scheme.
- (ii) Up to 31 August 2016 a total of 5,743 homes have had measures installed under the Affordable Warmth Scheme. The table below shows the figures by financial year.

	2015/16 (includes measures delivered from Sept 14)	2016/17 (Up to 31 August 2016)	Total
Households which have availed of the Affordable Warmth Scheme	3,064	2,679	5,743

- (iii) The total cost of measures provided to households under the scheme since its inception totals £20.5m. These reflect the costs of installing energy efficiency measures under the Scheme. The table below shows a breakdown of these costs by financial year along with the total costs of the scheme (including administration costs) also shown. The figures for the current financial year (2016/17) cover the period 1 April to 31 August 2016.

	2015/16 (includes costs incurred from Sept 14) (£k)	2016/17 (£k)	Total (£k)
Affordable Warmth Programme Costs	*11,563	9,007	20,570
Grand Total of Affordable Warmth Expenditure (including administration costs)	*18,966	11,090	30,056

*Note:- The Affordable Warmth Scheme was introduced in September 2014 and includes set up and IT costs for the start of the new scheme.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the Child Poverty Strategy.
(AQW 2500/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Executive's Child Poverty Strategy 2016-19 was laid in the Assembly on 25 March 2016.

My Department is specifically responsible for the development of a Social Strategy to complement the Programme for Government. Work to tackle child poverty will be integral to the development of this strategy.

Consultation on the Social Strategy will issue following Executive agreement in the coming weeks.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment of the business economic case for relocation of Jobs and Benefit Office service centres.
(AQW 2504/16-21)

Mr Givan: The implementation of changes to the welfare system as a result of the Welfare Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 2015 and the subsequent publication of the Evason Report will have a significant impact on the way that the Department for Communities delivers service to claimants.

These changes are being delivered against a background of continued pressure on public finances and reducing Departmental budgets. Therefore, the Department needs to ensure that service provision is efficient, maximising the delivery of value for money.

In preparation for the delivery of these changes, including the introduction of Universal Credit in September 2017, a programme of work is being taken forward to ensure that the local Jobs & Benefits and Social Security office network is 'fit for purpose' for the changes to benefit delivery and the introduction of new ways of working.

This assessment has included consideration of the feasibility and cost of modernising offices and the scope of the building to support the necessary IT infrastructure to deliver the new telephony and digital based services. We have also considered the number of claimants using individual offices and what options are available by which those claimants can continue to access the necessary services. This work has not yet been completed but the Department does plan to issue proposals for public consultation in the next number of weeks.

The new Discretionary Support Service has also been the subject of a full business case which has been approved by the Department of Finance. The funding of the new service requires my Department to make the necessary changes to enable the necessary finance and human resources to be released to fund and operate the new service.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the funding available for social enterprises.
(AQW 2507/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department has no available funding streams open to support social enterprises; however advisory support is available from Social Enterprise Hubs.

Social Enterprise Hubs are available for use by new social enterprises or existing social enterprises with a new product or service. They offer mentoring, advice, signposting, training, best practice visits, and space (admin or retail) where the social enterprises can test trade. There are nine hubs located across eleven locations in Derry / Londonderry, North Belfast, South Belfast, East Belfast, West Belfast, Lisburn, Downpatrick, Lurgan, Ballymena, Strabane and Enniskillen.

The Social Enterprise Hubs pilot project was one of the Signature Programmes taken forward with funding support (to the end of financial year 2015-16) from the Northern Ireland Executive's Delivering Social Change framework. An extension to funding in the 2016-17 year financial has been provided by my Department and the Department for the Economy and we are actively considering how the Hubs can be supported beyond this period.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) the location of all Social Security administration centres; and (ii) any proposed change to each of the locations.
(AQW 2516/16-21)

Mr Givan:

i) **The location of all Social Security administration centres**

The Working Age Services office network currently consists of 39 local offices providing face to face employment services and benefit related advice.

Whilst every office provides information and advice, the main administration and processing of claims for Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support and the provision of telephony services to Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support claimants is currently delivered from 11 Benefit Processing Centres located in Jobs and Benefits Offices at Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Foyle (Londonderry), Lurgan, Magherafelt, Newry, Andersonstown and Holywood Road in Belfast. Telephony support is also provided from the Jobs and Benefits Office in Omagh.

The processing of Social Fund Applications including Regulated Maternity and Funeral payments is currently delivered from 7 Processing Centres located in Jobs and Benefits Offices at Antrim, Armagh, Downpatrick, Foyle (Londonderry), Lisburn and Falls Road and Knockbreda in Belfast.

Employment and Support Allowance is administered centrally in James House in Belfast.

Disability and Carers Service, which is responsible for Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carers Allowance/Credits, is administered out of Castle Court, Royal Avenue, Belfast. Personal Independence Payment, which replaced Disability Living Allowance for working age claimants (age 16-64) from 20 June 2016, is also administered out of Castle Court.

ii) **Any proposed change to each of the locations.**

The Department for Communities is a regional organisation which is committed to delivering face to face services from a network of local offices. However in preparation for the delivery of Universal Credit in September 2017, we need to ensure that the local network of offices remains fit for purpose for these changes to benefit delivery and the introduction of new ways of working. The Department is also operating in a challenging financial environment and needs to ensure that service provision is efficient, maximising the delivery of value for money. The Department plans to shortly launch a Public Consultation Exercise on Proposals with regard to the local office network.

Work is also on-going to determine the appropriate structure for the processing of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance Benefit as these legacy benefits decline.

The outcome of this work is likely to be finalised in the near future and we expect the end state models to consist of a reduced number of Benefit Processing Centres in a functionalised business structure preparing the way for Universal Credit.

From the 1 November 2016 Discretionary Support and Short Term Benefit Advances will provide support in a financial crisis. This will be a telephony-based service delivered from Antrim and Dungannon Jobs & Benefits offices with face to face support available in front offices.

Financial Support in other times of need that is Budgeting Loans, Sure Start Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments and cold weather payments will continue as part of the new Finance Support service. These services will be consolidated into a single central processing centre in Lisburn Jobs & Benefits office.

Universal Credit, which will replace income based benefits along with Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, will be delivered from 3 Service Centres based in Newry, Londonderry and Belfast. Work is ongoing to finalise the Department's Universal Credit Service Delivery Model and rollout plans.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the amount of investment in sporting facilities since 2006, broken down by facility.

(AQW 2517/16-21)

Mr Givan: The former Department of Social Development (DSD) and the former Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), invested in a range of sporting facilities since 2006. In addition, Sport NI, an arms length body of DCAL, and now of the Department of Communities, also invested in sporting facilities.

During the period April 2006 to March 2016, Sport NI invested total funding of £103,908,748 in sports facilities.

The Department for Communities Retention and Disposal Schedule means that financial records are not held beyond six years. Therefore the investment details relating to the former Departments, DSD and DCAL, relate to the 6 year period April 2009 to March 2016. Expenditure for financial year 2016/17 is not included as it is ongoing and has not been finalised.

During the period April 2009 to March 2016 the Department of Communities (excluding Sport NI) invested a total of £73,952,606.61 in sporting facilities.

In addition, the former DSD was able to allocate European Peace Funding totalling €9,146,928 and £30,675,989 to sports projects for the period 2007 to 2013.

The details of all investments in sports facilities broken down by facility have been made available through the Assembly Library.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail the facilities available to athletes competing at competition level, including the Olympics.

(AQW 2518/16-21)

Mr Givan: It is the responsibility of the Governing Bodies of sport to identify and select the facilities to be used by their high performing athletes competing at competition level. While my Department does not hold a detailed list of all training facilities used by Governing Bodies for their competitive athletes, it has contributed to the development of a number of such facilities eg the 50 metre swimming pool at the Aurora Complex in Bangor and the regional stadiums for Football, Rugby and GAA.

In addition, the Sports Institute NI, Sport Northern Ireland's High Performance Centre, delivers expert, specialist support to Northern Ireland's top athletes and coaches. The Institute works across a range of Olympic, Paralympic and Commonwealth

Games sports along with a select number of sports including GAA, Golf, Cricket, Motor Sports, Rugby, and Soccer. In the 2015/16 financial year, one hundred and sixty talented and high performing athletes were able to use the facilities at the Sports Institute NI, which includes a gym, sports medicine/physiotherapy clinic and a sports science lab.

Sport NI is also developing a Sports Facility Framework, which will help to identify the need for sports facilities that are significant to all or large areas of Northern Ireland, and will include Facilities for High Performance Training and Competition and Facilities for Culturally Significant Sports. This work is ongoing and on completion will provide a framework for the strategic development of sports facilities throughout Northern Ireland

However, any athlete, regardless of ability or competition level, can access public sporting facilities. A list of facilities in Northern Ireland is available on the Active Places data-base <http://www.sportni.net/facilities/active-places-ni/> which includes, but does not specifically identify, those used by Governing Bodies for their high performance athletes.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail how much of Sport NI's budget is spent on Olympic sports, broken down by sport.

(AQW 2519/16-21)

Mr Givan: Sport NI, an Arms Length Body of my Department, currently provides funding to Olympic sports through its' Athlete Investment Programme and Performance Focus Programme. For the period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2017, total funding of £2,347,929 has been awarded to Governing Bodies with athletes competing at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. Details for each Olympic sport are included in Annex A attached.

Governing Body	Funding Programme	2013/14 (£)	2014/15 (£)	2015/16 (£)	2016/2017 (£)
		Exchequer			Lottery
Athletics Northern Ireland	Athlete Investment Programme	33,000	43,500	38,545	51,600
	Performance Focus	49,483	54,600	50,000	50,000
Irish Athletic Boxing Association	Athlete Investment Programme	51,100	69,000	96,000	100,000
	Performance Focus	50,000	50,000	50,000	50,000
Horse Sport Ireland	Athlete Investment Programme	88,500	69,000	66,085	51,000
Irish Ladies Golf Union	Athlete Investment Programme	18,000	25,500	25,600	28,000
Royal Yachting Association NI	Athlete Investment Programme	43,500	49,500	67,000	39,000
	Performance Focus	39,338	39,338	39,338	39,338
Triathlon Ireland	Athlete Investment Programme	36,000	28,500	36,000	24,000
	Performance Focus	66,500	66,500	66,500	66,500
Northern Ireland Archery Society	Athlete Investment Programme	10,500	33,000	6,000	16,000
Ulster Hockey Union	Athlete Investment Programme	35,000	35,000	107,064	100,000

Background note to Assembly Question AQW 2519/16-21

- 1 Andy Allen is a Ulster Unionist Party MLA for East Belfast constituency.
- 2 High Performance athletes in Northern Ireland are supported by Sport NI through an Athlete Investment Programme (AIP). This programme offers financial help for governing bodies with high performing athletes towards sports costs and also provides living costs for eligible high performing athletes. Governing bodies are responsible for identifying athletes and teams for the Athlete Investment Programme.
- 3 Through the Athlete Investment Programme Sport NI has invested £3,178,493 between 2013-2016 exchequer and £1,000,000 lottery for 2016/17.
- 4 Sport NI assesses the athletes and teams against the agreed performance standards.
- 5 Different levels of funding exist within the Athlete Investment Programme. Levels of funding are determined by the performance level of the athlete.

- 6 This year, April 2016 to March 2017, is the final year of the delivery of Sport Northern Ireland's Athlete Investment Programme.
- 7 Sport Northern Ireland also has the Performance Focus Programme.
- 8 Performance Focus is about giving Northern Ireland athletes the right conditions to heightening their chances of future success. It links sports development work in local clubs to appearances by athletes at the highest levels of their sport across the world.
- 9 Through Performance Focus, Sport Northern Ireland is investing £12.725m between 2013-2017 to create conditions affording athletes a greater chance of future success.
10. Investment through Performance Focus is developing:
 - Clubs
 - Coaches
 - Talented athletes
 - How bodies govern themselves to support future success; and
 - Support for athletes and coaches through specialist high performance services including sports medicine and physiology.
11. Sport Northern Ireland will continue to invest in athlete development from April 2017 through its Sporting Clubs and Sporting Winners Investment Programme 2017-2021.
12. Input to this response has been provided by Sport NI.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to detail how much of Sport NI's budget goes directly to supporting athletes. (AQW 2520/16-21)

Mr Givan: Sport NI provides both financial and practical support directly to high performing athletes, through funding programmes such as the Athlete Investment Programme and PerformanceFocus Programme; and through the expertise and services provided at the Sports Institute NI at Jordanstown.

The Athlete Investment Programme consists of two funding elements i.e. Living Costs which provides financial support directly to eligible, high performing, athletes to contribute to their essential living costs; and Sports Costs which are paid to Governing Bodies to provide training and competition programmes for talented and high performing athletes. Areas covered by this element include travel and accommodation costs associated with competitions, training, coaching, sports science, sports medicine support and equipment purchase.

The Athlete Investment Programme Living Cost figure for the last financial year up to 31 March 2016 was £86,660. The Athlete Investment Programme Sports Costs for the same period was £957,134.

In addition, one hundred and sixty athletes benefited directly from the expertise and practical services offered at Sport NI's Sports Institute NI (SINI). The total budget for SINI during the 2015/16 financial year, up to 31 March, was £1,684,887.

Complementary to this funding, Sport NI also provides funding to Governing Bodies of sports under the PerformanceFocus Programme which aims to improve athlete performance through advancing the development of a sustainable world leading performance system. Through PerformanceFocus, Sport NI is investing £12.725 million between 2013-2017 to create conditions affording athletes a greater chance of future success. While athletes do not receive this funding directly, the Governing Bodies use the funding to deliver improvements to their performance systems including areas such as governance and culture, coaching, talent and high performance operations.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Communities to outline how his Department plans to address the backlog of applications to the Affordable Warmth Scheme.

(AQW 2548/16-21)

Mr Givan: There is no backlog of applications to the Affordable Warmth Scheme. The Affordable Warmth Scheme is an area based targeted scheme which finds households most at risk of fuel poverty and provides a range of energy efficiency improvement measures including loft and cavity wall insulation, heating systems and replacement windows. The targeted nature of 'Affordable Warmth' means that the vast majority of households which benefit from the Scheme are contacted by local council officials to assess eligibility before passing the case on to a Housing Executive grants office. There is limited opportunity for any household to self refer to the Scheme.

In 2015/2016 over 3,000 households benefited through the Scheme. The current level of investment per household is averaging at over £4,000. The current budget for the Affordable Warmth Scheme for 2015/16 is £15.5m and it is anticipated that this will improve the energy efficiency of about 3,800 homes in this financial year.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on how plans to downgrade the Enniskillen Jobs and Benefits Office will impact on service users and staff.

(AQW 2553/16-21)

Mr Givan: I can confirm that there are no plans to downgrade Enniskillen Jobs and Benefits Office.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on how plans to merge the Fermanagh and Omagh Housing Executive Grants Offices will impact on service users and staff.

(AQW 2555/16-21)

Mr Givan: I have been advised by the Housing Executive that they are currently reviewing their grants service across Northern Ireland as part of their operational responsibility. This review is taking in a number of factors, though the central part of the review is to consider grants customer requirements with a view to shortening the processing times and to deliver this service to customers in their own homes, rather than requiring them to visit one of the Housing Executive's offices.

The review is taking into account wider local government changes across Northern Ireland. In this instance, the Housing Executive is proposing that it realigns the boundaries of grants offices to make them coterminous with local Council boundaries. This would mean that grants offices in the West would undertake all of the grants work in the District Council areas of Mid Ulster and Fermanagh and Omagh.

The review has also considered whether some back-office services could be amalgamated into one office in Omagh. This proposal also includes offering a service for customers to meet grants officers or to drop off documents in the Enniskillen housing office. It would have had no impact on staffing levels but has the potential of changing travel arrangements for a small number of staff. This proposal is still under consideration, with a decision to be made following consultation.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of homes that were improved using the Warm Homes Scheme during the last three financial years in which it operated.

(AQW 2557/16-21)

Mr Givan: A total of 24,787 of homes had energy efficiency measures installed under the Warm Homes Scheme during the last three financial years in which it operated, as detailed in the table below.

Financial Year	Number of Homes
2012/2013	9,755
2013/2014	8,019
2014/2015	7,013
Total	24,787

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of homes improved during 2015/16 through the Affordable Warmth Scheme, including home where (i) insulation improvement incurred; (ii) improved heating systems were installed; (iii) windows were repaired/replaced; and (iv) a solid wall with no insulation was in place.

(AQW 2558/16-21)

Mr Givan: In 2015/2016 the Affordable Warmth Scheme delivered 5,074 energy efficiency measures to 3,057 homes. The table below shows the breakdown of measures installed in the homes.

Energy Efficiency Measure	Number of Homes
Cavity Wall Insulation	300
Loft Insulation	1,170
Solid Wall Insulation	26
Draught Proofing	168
Improved Heating Systems	1,892
Windows Repaired/Upgraded	1,518

In many cases to improve their thermal comfort homes may receive more than one energy efficiency measure.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on the (i) delivery; and (ii) relocation of welfare reform services.

(AQW 2583/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am committed to having a strong regional based network of offices and the Department confirms its commitment to continue to progress a programme of modernisation and continuous improvement aimed at enhancing accessibility to services and the quality of local offices.

The Working Age Services local office network currently consists of 39 local offices, delivering a high level of customer service.

Universal Credit will be delivered from 3 Service Centres based in Newry, Londonderry and Belfast and work is ongoing to finalise the Department's Universal Credit Service Delivery Model and rollout plans.

Discretionary Support and Short Term Benefit Advances will provide support in a financial crisis. This will be a telephony-based service delivered from Antrim and Dungannon Jobs & Benefits offices.

Financial Support in other times of need that is Budgeting Loans, Sure Start Maternity Grants, Funeral Payments and cold weather payments will continue as part of the new Finance Support service. These services will be consolidated into a single central processing centre in Lisburn Jobs & Benefits office.

The processing of claims for Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support and the provision of telephony services to Jobseeker's Allowance and Income Support claimants is currently delivered from 11 Benefit Processing Centres located in Jobs and Benefits Offices at Andersonstown, Armagh, Ballymena, Coleraine, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Foyle, Holywood Road, Lurgan, Magherafelt and Newry. In preparation for the delivery of the changes to the benefits system a review is currently underway to determine the restructuring of the Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance Benefit Processing Centres.

The outcomes of the review are likely to be known in the near future. We expect the end state models to consist of a reduced number of Benefit Processing Centres in a functionalised business structure preparing the way for Universal Credit.

The Department needs to strike a balance between meeting the needs of claimants and those of staff and in order to safeguard service delivery to claimants it is sometimes necessary to relocate staff to ensure that services can continue to be delivered in an efficient and effective manner.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how much of Sport NI's budget is spent on administration.
(AQW 2633/16-21)

Mr Givan: For the current financial year, Sport NI has projected that it will spend £2.172 million on administrative expenses, out of a current total exchequer and lottery budget of £23.268 million.

This expenditure will enable the organisation to carry out its role as the Arms Length Body of my Department responsible for the development of sport in Northern Ireland and discharging its functions as a Lottery Distributor for sport in Northern Ireland.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities how his Department is encouraging and supporting potential athletes.
(AQW 2634/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department recognises the importance of encouraging and supporting potential athletes. This is addressed within the Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation 2009-2019, Sport Matters, whereby nine targets out of twenty six targets have been designed to support the continuous modernisation of sports organisations, the development of coaches and coaching standards, the development of talent and improved athlete performance.

The Sport Matters Implementation Group Progress Reports are published annually on the Department's website, and detail the activities which have taken place against each of the targets, including the nine Performance targets.

Following a Mid-Term Review of the Sport Matters Strategy in 2015, a new action plan was developed which sets out planned activities by a range of partners to meet each of the Sport Matters targets up to 2020.

The Sport Matters Strategy, Action Plans and Annual Implementation Group Progress Reports can be viewed on the Department's website by following the link below: -

www.communities-ni.gov.uk/articles/sport-matters-monitoring-group#toc-6

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Communities when the reroofing of the flats at Chichester Park East will take place.
(AQW 2652/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Housing Executive has advised that the Chichester Park East reroofing project is estimated to start in January 2017 subject to finances being available.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for his assessment on the implications of leaving the European Union on his Department's minority language policy.
(AQW 2656/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department will continue to meet all its obligations under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which is a convention under the Council of Europe, an organisation separate from the European Union.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to outline how Base 2 are currently establishing how allegations of intimidation are substantiated.
(AQW 2672/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Base2 project does not fall to the responsibility of my Department.

However, the assessment of the entitlement to intimidation points is the Housing Executive's responsibility. Enquiries to assist in their decision making process may be made to various sources, including Base2.

Housing Executive staff must obtain specific consent from the applicant permitting enquiries with Base2. Only after this consent has been given can the Housing Executive contact Base2. Base2 may make enquiries within the local community regarding the applicant's circumstances and their personal situation.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail how many homes sold under the Right to Buy Scheme have been bought back by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and/or Housing Associations.

(AQW 2673/16-21)

Mr Givan: The 'Option to Purchase' under the House Sales Scheme which was introduced in October 2004, grants the Housing Executive or its nominee (Housing Associations) an option to buy back the dwelling from the vendor within ten years from the date of the house sale.

Since the 'Option to Purchase' was introduced, 12 properties have been bought back by nominated Housing Associations. No properties have been bought back by the Housing Executive.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail the total number of claimants that will be transferred from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment; and (ii) to provide a breakdown of the qualifications of those conducting the assessments of Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payment claimants.

(AQW 2674/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) Personal Independence Payment was introduced in Northern Ireland on 20 June 2016 and in addition to new claims for this benefit, all existing Disability Living Allowance working age claimants (aged 16 – 64), of which there are approximately 125,000, will be invited to claim Personal Independence Payment.
- (ii) Capita Health and Wellbeing deliver the PIP Assessment Service on behalf of the Department. To date Capita have recruited 97 Healthcare Professionals which consists of 57 Nurses, 19 Occupational Therapists, 15 Physiotherapists and 6 Paramedics.

All Healthcare professionals must have the following qualifications and experience:-

- (a) They are an occupational therapist, nurse (level 1), physiotherapist, paramedic or doctor;
- (b) They are fully registered with the relevant licensing body (doctors must have a licence to practise);
- (c) They have no sanctions attached to registration unless they relate to disability;
- (d) They have at least 2 years post full registration experience.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the allocation of funding outlined in the specific advice in the Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group Report.

(AQW 2715/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Fresh Start Agreement, £8m funding was committed over four years to put additional independent advice services in place for Welfare Reform.

The Department is currently in the final stages of agreeing a contract with the Welfare Reform Advice Services Consortium (Citizens Advice, AdviceNI and the Law Centre NI) to provide a freephone helpline and additional frontline advisers.

And I have recently announced that the Department will also be providing £800k of additional funding, inclusive of £600k to local councils to help them support and prepare existing frontline services in advance of the new services being put in place.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to outline what schemes or funding is available through his Department for town centre regeneration for towns and rural villages.

(AQW 2738/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department funds a number of regeneration programmes in town centres. These include; Restore/ Revitalisation Programmes, Comprehensive Development Schemes, Public Realm Schemes and the Urban Development Grant Scheme.

These urban regeneration programmes are delivered in settlements which have a population of 5,000 or more persons, in accordance with the agreed urban/rural definition. Village renewal is funded by the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Communities to detail (i) when a final decision will be made in relation to the use of the Destination Building in the proposed redevelopment of Queens Parade, Bangor; (ii) whether he will have any influence or veto over this decision; and (iii) the ideas around possible use are currently under consideration.

(AQW 2748/16-21)

Mr Givan: My officials are currently working with Ards and North Down Borough Council on a development brief for the Queen's Parade Scheme. The development brief will detail my Department's regeneration objectives and assessment criteria for the overall Queen's Parade Scheme. Council has been exploring options on how they could become directly involved within the scheme, such as the Vennel Building and these will be incorporated into the development brief. The development brief is due to be published in October 2016 and developers will be allowed 3 months to submit proposals. Following the closing date an assessment panel comprising members from my Department and Council will evaluate the proposals submitted for the entire Queen's Parade scheme including the Vennel Building. As this is a joint exercise DfC and Council approval for the preferred option will be needed.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail any review his Department has undertaken in relation to the Steps to Work Programme, particularly regarding sanctions and real outcomes for participants.

(AQW 2753/16-21)

Mr Givan: To date the Department for Communities has not carried out any formal reviews of the Steps 2 Success programme.

The imposition of a sanction to the benefits of participants on the Steps 2 Success is undertaken by a Decision Maker. This process is in line with that for all benefit sanction considerations. There are fixed period sanctions for which there can be no discretion on the part of a Decision Maker. Information on the number of sanctions related to participants on the Steps 2 Success programme is contained in the answer to AQW 2752/16-21.

Steps 2 Success is an employment programme and the programme performance is recorded for the Department by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency who publish a Steps 2 Success Statistical Bulletin on quarterly basis. This bulletin can be found at <https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/publications/steps-2-success-statistical-bulletin-october-2014-june-2016>. The latest Statistical Bulletin was published on 25 August 2016. The Statistical Bulletin compares actual programme performance with the programme targets. Information on the job entry performance of Steps 2 Success is contained in the answer to AQW 2752/16-21.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister for Communities to detail the options for participants on the Steps to Success Programme to have their individual training and education needs reflected in any programme delivery.

(AQW 2754/16-21)

Mr Givan: Steps 2 Success is the Department for Communities main employment programme and has been designed to assist participants to find and keep appropriate work. Steps 2 Success is not a training or education programme. There are training courses available throughout Northern Ireland funded and delivered by a range of different bodies such as the Further Education Colleges and the European Social Fund. People can avail of these opportunities before they commence on Steps 2 Success.

When a participant commences on Steps 2 Success they agree a Progression to Employment Plan which outlines the activities they must undertake and the support that they will receive from their contractor. The contractor can agree to specific job related training as part of the Progression to Employment Plan but have no contractual obligation to do so.

Each of the three delivery organisations has a wide range of support and assistance that they offer to participants and they must ensure that their services are at least at the level defined by the relevant Service Guarantee.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Communities whether he has given consideration to introducing a minimum Energy Performance Certificate rating requirement in order to rent out a domestic property, as will be the case in England and Wales from April 2018.

(AQW 2781/16-21)

Mr Givan: My Department is currently carrying out a review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector and this is one of the issues being considered as part of the review. Proposals for change resulting from the review will be published for consultation in the coming months.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities to provide an update on the rollout of the Líofo campaign.

(AQW 2817/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Líofo campaign target of 20,000 sign-ups by 2020 has not yet been reached. The initiative is currently under review.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline the stated purpose and objectives of Gael Acadamh; and (ii) to provide an update on the work of his Department to develop this project.

(AQW 2818/16-21)

Mr Givan:

- (i) The former DCAL Minister's Assembly Statement in March 2016 set out proposals for an Ulster-Scots Institute and an Irish-Language Academy.

The purpose and objectives for the Irish Language Academy or Gael Acadamh include a community focus on economic, social regeneration and employment, and, an academic focus on high quality adult learning.

- (ii) Work to progress the Academy is now being taken forward through a business case overseen by a Project Board.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Communities to detail the number of empty homes in each constituency.

(AQW 2835/16-21)

Mr Givan: Information on the number of empty homes is held by the Department of Finance's Land and Property Services. The most recent figures (as at 31/03/16) that Land and Property Services (LPS) have provided to my Department indicate a total of 20,629 empty residential properties across Northern Ireland. LPS only provide this information by Council area and the table below shows the breakdown;

Council Area	Vacant Properties
Belfast City Council	3745
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	2601
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	2332
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	2223
Mid Ulster District Council	2069
Causeway Coast and Glens District Council	1846
Ards and North Down District Council	1496
Derry City and Strabane District Council	1242
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	1138
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	1046
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	891
Grand Total	20629

LPS have advised that these figures should be treated with caution as there is no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land and 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 Statistic Authority.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Communities to detail indicative timescales for the commencement and completion of the respective Housing Association planned new build schemes for urban and rural Strabane, as contained in the Derry City and Strabane Housing Investment Plan 2015-19.

(AQW 2836/16-21)

Mr Givan: The table shown below details planned start and completion years with respect to new social housing schemes programmed for Strabane, as detailed in the Derry City and Strabane Housing Investment Plan (Annual Update 2016).

Housing associations are also developing further proposals for Strabane which will be considered by the Housing Executive as it formulates the draft Social Housing Development Programme 2017/18-2019/20. This new programme will be published early in the New Year.

Planned start and completion years with respect to new social housing schemes programmed for Strabane

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Ward	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Start Year	Completion Year
Triangle	Douglas Bridge ESPs	Victoria Bridge	Douglas Bridge	Existing Satisfactory Purchase (ESP)	General Needs	Rural	4	2016/17	2016/17
Habinteg	84 Bridge Street	East Ward	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	Urban	4	2016/17	2017/18

Housing Association	Scheme Name	Ward	Location	Type	Need Group	Strategic Group	Units	Start Year	Completion Year
Habinteg	Adria Factory, Strabane Ph 1	Bally-colman	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	Urban	30	2016/17	2018/19
Habinteg	Newton Lane	North	Strabane	New Build	General Needs	Urban	25	2016/17	2018/19
Rural	Sion Mills ESPs	Sion Mills	Sion Mills	Existing Satisfactory Purchase (ESP)	General Needs	Rural	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Ballymagorry ESPs	Slievekirk	Ballymagorry	Existing Satisfactory Purchase (ESP)	General Needs	Rural	5	2017/18	2018/19
Triangle	Lismore Park	Sion Mills	Sion Mills	New Build	General Needs	Rural	4	2017/18	2018/19

Existing Satisfactory Purchases (ESPs) are existing dwellings purchased from the property market with little or no replacement or improvement work required to provide an acceptable standard of housing.

Please be advised that programmed schemes can be lost or slip to future programme years for a variety of reasons such as delays in acquiring sites and/or failure to secure planning permission.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities (i) to detail how many organisations and arm's-length bodies within his departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and (ii) to outline how an established recruitment agency is considered.

(AQW 2848/16-21)

Mr Givan: The following bodies within my Departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff:

- Armagh Observatory and Planetarium
- Arts Council NI
- Libraries NI
- National Museums NI
- Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee
- Sport NI
- Ulster Scots Agency
- Ulster Supported Employment Ltd

Recruitment agencies are considered through the use of the Department of Finance's contract for the supply of temporary/short term workers; through the use of a framework managed by the Education Authority; or through invitation to tender.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister for Communities to detail the departmental funding available to promote or improve small town centres.

(AQW 2853/16-21)

Mr Givan: Small Towns are defined by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) as settlements with a population of between 5,000 and 9,999 persons.

Settlements of this size are potentially eligible for funding from a number of departmental regeneration schemes designed to improve or promote town centres. These are the; Public Realm, Comprehensive Development, Restore/ Revitalisation and Urban Development Grant Schemes.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Communities to outline any planned changes to the services provided by (i) Ballymena; and (ii) Ballymoney Jobs and Benefits Offices.

(AQW 2858/16-21)

Mr Givan: I am committed to having a strong regional office network to provide local access to employment services and benefit advice. Currently there are 39 local offices across Northern Ireland and Ballymena and Ballymoney Jobs and Benefits

offices play an important role in delivering a high level of customer service. Going forward both Ballymena and Ballymoney will continue to play an important role in delivering information, advice and support to claimants.

Of these 39 offices 11 also undertake benefit processing for Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance; one of these processing centres is located in Ballymena.

In preparation for the changes to the benefits system brought about by Welfare Reform, work is on-going to determine the appropriate structure for the processing of Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance Benefit as these legacy benefits decline.

The outcome of this work is likely to be finalised in the near future. We expect the end state models to consist of a reduced number of Benefit Processing Centres in a functionalised business structure preparing the way for Universal Credit.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister for Communities (i) to outline the criteria used to decide areas of priority for the Affordable Warmth Scheme; and (ii) whether he will review these criteria.

(AQW 2883/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Affordable Warmth Scheme is an area based targeted scheme aimed at owner occupiers and those who rent from a private sector landlord. In order to qualify for the scheme the household must have a total gross annual income of less than £20,000.

A tailor-made targeting tool was developed and tested for identifying households in severe fuel poverty. It aimed to find small areas of Northern Ireland (around 150 households in size) where most households are likely to be in fuel poverty, and a sizeable proportion of these are likely to be in extreme fuel poverty. It uses more than a dozen databases to calculate likelihoods in these small areas, and these include:

- housing quality data;
- estimates of income and benefit dependency;
- prevailing oil and gas prices;
- prevailing temperatures;
- demographic vulnerability profiles.

Subsequent validation of the accuracy of this targeting tool was based on detailed survey data from more than 2,100 homes across all of Northern Ireland. The validation assessment indicated that:

- the tool was able to identify small areas in which 89% of all households were in fuel poverty;
- 38% were in extreme fuel poverty.

The data indicates that the accuracy of targeting resources towards those most in need has been considerably enhanced by the application of this approach to targeting those in fuel poverty by my Department.

Following successful pilot testing in 2012 and 2013 the targeting tool was used to identify addresses in each council area most likely to be at risk of fuel poverty and ranked these in order of severity. These ranked lists were provided to councils and they have been engaged in a programme of visiting and surveying the households to assess eligibility and work with colleagues in the Housing Executive to improve the energy efficiency of the homes.

The targeting tool proved to be very effective in identifying households most at risk of fuel poverty during the pilot phases of Affordable Warmth and evidence from the first full year of operation of the scheme confirms that the targeting tool is effective in identifying homes in real need of help.

The Affordable Warmth Scheme completed its first full year of operation in March 2016 and is currently being reviewed. This review will include an examination of the accuracy of the targeting tool used to select the target areas.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline what work his Department has or intends to undertake to examine the impact of Welfare Reform post mitigation.

(AQW 2916/16-21)

Mr Givan: As part of the Fresh Start Agreement, the approach agreed by the main political parties in Northern Ireland to implement welfare reform, there was a commitment to review welfare arrangements in 2018-19.

Department for Communities officials have now developed and refined a composite Welfare Reform evaluation strategy. This strategy has been designed to specifically evaluate each of the key reforms as well as the associated mitigations. It will be central in assessing and monitoring the impacts of Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland and will help to inform implementation and future strategy.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities for an update on the future development of St. Patrick's Barracks.

(AQW 2919/16-21)

Mr Givan: The Department's planning consultants have prepared a preferred option that maximises the development opportunities on the St Patrick's Barracks site in Ballymena. This option has been endorsed by Mid and East Antrim Borough

Council and will be subject to public consultation before an outline planning application is submitted. The consultation period is expected to commence in October.

Background note to Assembly Question AQW 2919/16-21

13. Andy Allen is an Ulster Unionist Party MLA for the East Belfast constituency.
14. The Department for Communities purchased the St Patrick's Barracks site from The Executive Office in September 2015. Since then, the Department's Housing Group has been working closely with urban regeneration staff, based in the local Regional Development Office in Ballymena, to advance the site as a Signature Pilot Scheme. It is anticipated that the site will include shared social housing, privately owned and privately rented accommodation.
15. DfC is leading on the sites development with interest from other public sector stakeholders; Mid and East Antrim Borough Council, the PSNI, and the Northern Regional College.
16. The Paul Hogarth Company were appointed as planning and transport consultants in March 2016, and have held two 'visioning' open days (on site) in April and June. A number of development options were presented and a preferred option has been selected for detailed design. This option was endorsed by Mid and East Antrim Borough Council in July.
17. The planning consultants are arranging a Pre Application Discussion with the local Planning Office to ensure that all the information required for a planning decision is available. Subject to the outcome of this meeting, it is expected that the preferred development option will be presented for public consultation, starting in October. There is likely to be significant local interest in the proposals. The planning application will then be submitted following the consultation period.
18. A number of issues are still to be resolved around access and the retention of some buildings. Site preparation works, to clear some of the existing buildings and to undertake remedial works to deal with land contamination, will have to be completed. The first phase of development for housing and sports/leisure use, including road infrastructure, could commence as early as 2018/19, subject to full planning approval.
19. A Programme Board for the sites development is being led by a Departmental senior official, with representation from other stakeholders. The phased development of the site will be monitored and reviewed by the Programme Board.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Communities to outline (i) what discussion he has had with the Minister of Finance; and (ii) what contingencies plan he has in place should the Office of National Statistics reclassify housing associations.
(AQW 3180/16-21)

Mr Givan: As you are aware, the ONS decision is due to issue shortly and is expected to have potentially significant impacts if housing associations are to be reclassified as public bodies. I can confirm I have met with the Minister of Finance and his officials and discussed the pending ONS decision. The most recent of these meetings was on Tuesday 13 September 2016.

In relation to the contingency plans, these can be finalised once the scope and impacts of the ONS decision is known. To ensure we are prepared, in advance of a decision, my officials have reviewed both the current legislative and regulatory framework to identify the most likely areas that ONS will focus on.

My Department have also been in regular contact with Departments in other jurisdictions to discuss various issues and identify comparisons.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister for Communities to detail the network of organisations working on a partnership application for the Fresh Start programme.
(AQW 3200/16-21)

Mr Givan: Representatives from the organisations listed below have been assisting my officials from the Voluntary and Community Division in developing an early intervention under the Fresh Start Agreement.

- Department of Justice;
- Probation Board for Northern Ireland;
- The Executive Office;
- Community Foundation for Northern Ireland;
- Co-operation Ireland;
- Womens Resource and Development Agency;
- Foyle Women's Information Network;
- Intercomm;
- Training for Women Network;
- Women's Support Network;
- Rural Community Network;
- Northern Ireland Rural Women's Network.

Department of Education

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Education to outline the current funding provided by his Department to assist continual professional development of existing teaching staff.

(AQW 1715/16-21)

Mr Weir (The Minister of Education): The Education Authority (EA) provides training for teachers through its School Development Service and has advised that it has a budget of £6.06m for the current financial year.

My Department has invested a further £6.2m in teacher training opportunities which are managed by the EA and other education partners. In addition, a number of other initiatives funded by my Department, at a cost of £16.3m, include an element of teacher training however it is not possible to separately identify the costs for this training.

Schools themselves receive delegated budgets under the Local Management of Schools funding arrangements and it is the responsibility of Boards of Governors and Principals to determine how this funding will be spent in accordance with their pupils' needs. Teacher training needs should be identified through the School Development Planning process and schools may meet the costs of some of this through their delegated budget.

During the course of the school year my Department has also made available five staff training days (known as Baker Days) and up to five school development days which may be used for teacher training at an opportunity cost of over £20m.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education how he will address the delay in the progress of the cross-border residential autism centre in Armagh.

(AQW 2325/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Middletown Centre for Autism provides an excellent service and plays a vital role in meeting the needs of children with autism. My Department's current focus for the Centre is the delivery of the outreach learning support and assessment service, the training and advisory service and the research and information service.

The outreach learning support and assessment service, developed following the pause in funding in 2009, is fundamentally the same support as was originally intended, but delivered within the child's home and school setting, instead of on site at the Middletown Centre.

The Centre has advised that this outreach intervention work is having an immediate and prolonged impact not just on children and young people with autism who are referred, but also on their families, school staff and other pupils.

Indeed the recent joint inspection evaluation found that this service is highly valued and leads to improved outcomes for the pupils, both at school and at home.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education following the decision to move non-teaching staff from a four weekly to monthly pay cycle, to detail (i) the rationale for this decision; and (ii) any consultation on this decision.

(AQW 2326/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has advised that re-alignment of payrolls is required in preparation for the implementation of a single integrated Finance/Payroll/HR system.

The pay cycles in place across the former Education and Library Boards (ELBs), prior to establishment of the EA, were complex. There were thirteen non-teaching payrolls, operating on six different pay cycles with six different pay dates, which resulted in similar categories of staff being paid on different dates and payment cycles.

Two of the payment cycles were monthly with one paid at the end of the month (current) and one paid mid-month (being two weeks in arrears). The remaining four were lunar pay cycles (i.e. four weekly, with thirteen pay dates in the course of a year) with each cycle paying on a different payment schedule.

The ELB arrangements were reviewed in the context of the new single Authority which is implementing a new Finance/HR/Payroll system. Maintaining this number of existing payrolls was not considered efficient for the future workings of the new single Authority with a new single integrated Finance, HR and Payroll system. Maintaining the complex ELB arrangements for the new system would have significantly increased the risk of staff being paid incorrectly.

The EA considered that the most efficient way forward would be to pay all staff on a monthly cycle. In preparation for the new Finance HR and Payroll system and reflecting that the EA was now the single employing Authority a decision was made to rationalise and harmonise arrangements prior to implementation of the new system. The Authority is working to minimise the impact on staff as it makes this change.

- (ii) Consultation with trade unions has been carried out at a high level through the Joint Negotiating Council meeting on 27th May 2016 and at a local level through Staff Consultative Committees.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail all projects, including their purpose, in his Department which have benefited from European funding in the past five years; and (ii) to outline the implications for these projects in the event of a withdrawal of European Union membership.

(AQW 2353/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department's ability to access EU funding is directly linked to the applicability of EU funding streams to the core business of the Department.

Based on information available within my Department the table below details the funding received in the last 5 years from the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in NI and the Border Region of Ireland (Peace II) and the NI Programme for Building Sustainable Prosperity (BSP) from 2000-2006.

Contribution from EU - DE acting as principal for EU*

Financial Year	£000
2011-12	5,594
2012-13	1,976
2013-14	0
2014/15	0
2015/16	0

* The amounts shown all relate to match funding.

The programmes funded through Peace II and BSP ended more than five years ago. Although income has been received in the last 5 years, this is due to the claims process and subsequent timing of income.

My Department has focused on maximising the support available from the EU's Comenius and Youth in Action Programmes which ended on 31 December 2013 and the EU's Erasmus+ programme which was launched on 1 January 2014.

The British Council was the National Agency for the Comenius and Youth in Action programmes and the British Council in partnership with Ecorys, is the National Agency responsible for delivering the EU's Erasmus+ programme. The education service here has been able to benefit from the following amounts drawn down by the National Agency in each of the last available 5 financial years:

Financial Year**	Drawdown
2010/11	£1.4m
2011/12	£1.2m
2012/13	£1.6m
2013/14*	£2.2m
2014/15*	£1.8m

* Erasmus+ drawdown for Year 3 (2013/14) and 4 (2014/15) is provisional.

** Erasmus+ drawdown for 2015/16 is not yet available.

The Erasmus+ programme offers opportunities for UK participants to study, work, volunteer, teach and train abroad in Europe. It is aimed at students, trainees, apprentices, pupils, adult learners, young people, volunteers, professors, teachers, trainers, youth workers and professionals of organisations active in the education, training and youth sector.

Until a withdrawal plan has been negotiated and we know the details, it is too early to comment on the implications for projects in the event of a withdrawal of European Union membership.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail all decisions which he has taken in relation to Irish medium education funding or development proposals within the Irish medium sector since May 2016.

(AQW 2354/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since May 2016 I have made the funding decisions in relation to Irish medium education as detailed in the table below.

Irish-medium Education funding decisions since May 2016

Date	Decision	Value	Notes
July 2016	Approved	£110,000	This funding is in respect of a Nurture Pilot in 2 Irish Medium primary schools in 2016/17 (Scoil an Droichid and Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin).
August 2016	Not Approved	£1,100,000	This proposed funding was for specialist modular accommodation for Gaelcholáiste Dhoire. Alternative options for the provision of specialist accommodation are now being considered by the Department.

Date	Decision	Value	Notes
August 2016	Approved	£276,000	This funding is an element within the Extended Schools (ES) programme the funds provides support for 31 ES Clusters that deliver activities which promote learning and awareness of the Irish language across schools and communities. The funding is for 2016/17

Since May 2016 I have taken decisions on four statutory development proposals relating to schools in the Irish medium sector as detailed in the table below.

Irish-medium Development Proposals since May 2016

School	DP No	Proposal	Date of decision	Decision
Gaelscoil an Lonnáin	452	To relocate Gaelscoil an Lonnáin from its current site on the Falls Road, Belfast to the site of the former St Comghall's Primary School, Falls Road, Belfast with effect from 1 September 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter.	17/6/16	Turned Down/ Officials should liaise with Comhairle na Gaelscoilaíochta and the Education Authority to ensure they work together through governance structures and processes to encourage and facilitate the strategic development of sustainable IM primary provision in Belfast in line with the statutory duty.
Gaelscoil na Daróige	454	The establishment of a part-time statutory IM nursery unit, with 26 part-time places, at Gaelscoil na Daróige, with effect from 1 September 2016, or as soon as possible thereafter.	09/08/16	Turned down.
Bunscoil an Iúir	455	The establishment of a grant-aided IM nursery unit (with 26 part-time places) at Bunscoil an Iúir with effect from 1 September 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/08/16	Turned down.
Gaelscoil Éanna	449	The establishment of a statutory IM nursery unit (with 26 full-time places) at Gaelscoil Éanna with effect from 1 September 2017 or as soon as possible thereafter.	15/9/16	Approved – with modification for 26 part-time place nursery unit.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to establish a single post primary transfer test.

(AQW 2400/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have tasked my officials to engage with relevant stakeholders to make swift progress to improve the current arrangements. I do not wish to pre-empt the conclusion of that engagement but it is in the best interests of children to find a way forward in good time.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to give more control over budgets and resources to schools.

(AQW 2401/16-21)

Mr Weir: The percentage of the 2016-17 Education budget currently allocated to the Aggregated Schools Budget is 60%. On top of this, around 12% of the overall 2016-17 budget is allocated to schools from the centre budgets held by the Education Authority with a further 13% attributable to schools for services provided to them. Therefore around 85% of my Departmental budget goes towards schools funding.

It is my intention, to give greater freedom and autonomy to schools over how they spend their budget. Over the coming months, I will be looking at ways and means of achieving this.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what percentage of his Department's 2016/17 budget has been allocated to the Aggregated Schools' Budget.

(AQW 2402/16-21)

Mr Weir: The percentage of the 2016-17 Education budget currently allocated to the Aggregated Schools Budget is 60%. On top of this, around 12% of the overall 2016-17 budget is allocated to schools from the centre budgets held by the Education Authority with a further 13% attributable to schools for services provided to them. Therefore around 85% of my Departmental budget goes towards schools funding.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to mainstream the Numeracy and Literacy Signature Project.

(AQW 2403/16-21)

Mr Weir: Following the successful implementation of the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme, a legacy programme was put in place to disseminate to school leaders ways in which they can, within their own resources, mainstream the approaches to tackling underachievement that have been shown to be effective in many of the schools supported by DSC. Further dissemination of the good practice identified will take place during this academic year. I will be giving consideration as to how to best take forward the legacy of the signature programme in the future.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to address the issue of the Catholic Teacher Training Certificate requirement for teachers.

(AQW 2404/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have stated my commitment to deliver equality for all school sectors; this includes consideration of the Catholic Teacher Training Certificate, known as the Certificate in Religious Education, and an end to Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (FETO).

It is important to note that the Certificate in Religious Education (the Certificate) and the Exception under Article 71 of FETO are mutually exclusive. FETO is the legislative responsibility of The Executive office (TEO) and therefore any amendments to the legislation would be a matter for them to address.

The requirement for the Certificate is an employer's decision. It is a policy decision of some employers, namely the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and some Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) schools, that teachers seeking employment at nursery or primary level must hold a teachers' Certificate in Religious Education.

I understand that you do not have to be of a particular religion, or any, to hold the Certificate in Religious Education.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the criteria for the provision of an escort as part of the School Transport Service; and (ii) how many children with Special Education Needs currently avail of this service in Upper Bann.

(AQW 2429/16-21)

Mr Weir: Home to School transport assistance is provided for pupils with a special transport need only on the recommendation of a Designated Medical Officer as part of the statutory assessment process. This will include any special requirements including the provision of an escort.

The Education Authority has informed me that in relation to the information requested in part (ii) of your question, it is not held in a readily accessible format and an exercise to produce it would result in disproportionate cost. Allocation of escort supervision is not provided on a per pupil basis unless the pupil's statement of special educational need explicitly states that this is required.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Education what discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance concerning the potential to ringfence any money arising from the implementation of the soft drinks levy for the purposes of health education in schools.

(AQW 2443/16-21)

Mr Weir: The sugar levy is not expected to be introduced until 2018, therefore the impact on the Northern Ireland budget is uncertain. At that time the Barnett formula will be applied in the normal way to spending on these initiatives, meaning any possible consequentials will be unhypothecated. While I will make a strong case that any funding should be ring-fenced for Education, it will be up to the Executive to decide how it would be allocated in light of emerging pressures and priorities.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the payments of pension contributions to both voluntary and statutory sector full-time youth workers employed through or paid by the Education Authority; and (ii) to outline the difference in pension payments and entitlements provided by the Authority to both full-time and part-time voluntary sector employees.

(AQW 2454/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) The Education Authority (EA) has advised that all pension contributions which are made on behalf of the youth employers are made directly to the relevant pension scheme which the staff are members of.

The table below gives details of the employer contributions paid to the pension scheme(s)

Financial Year	Total Payments £'s
1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016	906,041.93
1 April 2016 to 31 August 2016	432,297.55

- (ii) The EA is not the employer of staff in the voluntary sector and is not in a position to comment on the pension payments and entitlements of either part-time or full-time staff employed in that sector.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he intends to publish explanatory notes and/or guidance in relation to the Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015.

(AQW 2458/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Member will be aware that the Children's Services Co-operation Act links directly to the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. This Strategy will be expected to outline how the Executive will work together to deliver improved well-being for children and young people. A significant amount of work, including engagement with stakeholders through co-design, has taken place on the Strategy and it will be issued for formal consultation in due course.

A common theme in the co-design process has been the need for better co-operation across Executive departments, agencies and stakeholders to deliver better services for children and young people. I therefore intend to use the Strategy as a vehicle to promote better co-operation and outline how this could be facilitated, in order to support the realisation of better outcomes for children and young people.

I expect there could be a need for either formal guidance on co-operation or explanatory notes on the Act, however this will be informed by the consultation process on the forthcoming Strategy. In the meantime, my officials have been highlighting the duty to co-operate, as set out in the Act, amongst Departments and other Children's Authorities.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what arrangements have been made to promote co-operation as required by Section 2(2) of the Children's Services Co-operation Act.

(AQW 2477/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since the Children's Services Co-operation Act received Royal Assent my officials have been promoting the duties under the Act with those bodies named in the legislation – highlighting the need for better co-operation.

In terms of the Executive making arrangements to promote co-operation, this is being considered in line with the development of the new Children and Young People's Strategy. I expect the Strategy to explain that the well-being of children and young people can only be improved if we agree the better outcomes we wish to achieve; ensure better delivery of services and actions; and facilitate better co-operation across key bodies.

The arrangements to be made by the Executive will be informed by the development of the Strategy and the formal consultation process, when stakeholders can give their views on how co-operation could be promoted. I understand that during the informal co-design process the issue of better co-operation has been a key issue for stakeholders. I expect the Strategy to outline how co-operation could be promoted through the agreement of key principles of co-operative working; the potential establishment of effective structures; and through the proactive identification of opportunities to co-operate.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Education to outline the funding available to childcare organisations.

(AQW 2506/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Bright Start School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, launched in March 2014, aims to create new or sustain existing childcare settings. Grant Scheme support is available for minor capital expenditure (premises and equipment), for revenue (running costs), or both. It is delivered by the Health and Social Care Board via the Childcare Partnerships on behalf of the Department of Education (DE). To date it has provided some £6 million to support 3,000 sustainable childcare places across 114 childcare settings.

There are other early years initiatives that offer support for childcare, for example, sessional care provision made available for children whose parents are attending Sure Start services. A wide range of organisations provide childcare which is funded from sources other than DE.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the agreed Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and early years initiatives.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education whether he will introduce legislation to allow flexibility with regards to the school starting age.

(AQW 2512/16-21)

Mr Weir: As I am currently considering the legislative proposals I wish to progress during the 2016-2021 Programme for Government period, it is not possible to provide you with an update on this matter at present. However, I am aware of the work

that was undertaken during the previous mandate and the range of issues involved. I will take these into consideration when determining the way forward.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the post-primary schools that are not compliant with the Entitlement Framework; (ii) the reasons for non-compliance; and (iii) his Department's plans for offering maximum subject choice to pupils. **(AQW 2540/16-21)**

Mr Weir: In order to be fully compliant with Entitlement Framework (EF) post-primary schools must provide pupils with access to a minimum of 24 courses at Key Stage 4 (KS4) and 27 courses at post-16 (if they offer post-16 provision). In addition, at least one third of the courses offered must be general and one third applied. The table below lists the schools that have not been compliant with the EF requirements in 2015/16 and indicates which aspect(s) of the requirements each failed to meet.

School Name	KS4 Course Count Compliant	KS4 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)	Post-16 Course Count Compliant	Post-16 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)
Abbey Community College	Y	N	N	N
Antrim Grammar School	Y	Y	N	N
Ashfield Boys' High	N	N	N	N
Ashfield Girls' High	Y	Y	N	N
Ballyclare High School	Y	Y	N	N
Ballyclare Secondary School	Y	Y	N	N
Ballymoney High School	Y	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Ballynahinch High School	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Banbridge Academy	N	N	Y	Y
Banbridge High	Y	Y	N	N
Bangor Academy & Sixth Form College	Y	Y	N	N
Blackwater Integrated College	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Bloomfield Collegiate	Y	Y	N	N
Breda Academy	Y	Y	N	N
Brownlow College	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Cambridge House Grammar School	Y	Y	N	N
Carrickfergus College	N	N	N	N
Carrickfergus Grammar School	N	N	Y	Y
Christian Brothers' School, Belfast	N	N	Y	Y
City of Armagh High School	N	N	N	N
Colaiste Feirste	N	N	N	N
Coleraine College	N	N	N	N
Collegiate Grammar School	N	N	N	N
Corpus Christi College	N	N	N	N
Craigavon Senior High School	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Crumlin Integrated	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Cullybackey College	Y	Y	N	N
Dalriada School	Y	Y	N	N
De La Salle College	Y	Y	N	N
De La Salle High School	N	N	N	N
Dean Maguirc College	Y	Y	N	N
Devenish College	N	N	N	N

School Name	KS4 Course Count Compliant	KS4 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)	Post-16 Course Count Compliant	Post-16 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)
Dominican College, Belfast	Y	Y	N	N
Dominican College, Portstewart	N	N	N	N
Dromore High	Y	Y	N	N
Drumglass High	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Drumragh Integrated College	Y	Y	N	N
Dundonald High School	Y	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Edmund Rice College	Y	Y	N	N
Erne Integrated College	N	N	N	N
Fivemiletown College	Y	Y	N	N
Fort Hill Integrated College	Y	Y	Y	N
Friends' School	Y	Y	N	N
Glastry College	N	N	N	N
Glengormley High School	Y	Y	N	N
Hazelwood Integrated College	Y	Y	N	N
Hunterhouse College	N	N	Y	Y
Kilkeel High	Y	Y	N	N
Lagan College	Y	Y	N	N
Larne Grammar School	N	N	N	N
Larne High School	Y	N	N	N
Laurelhill Community College	Y	Y	N	N
Limavady High School	Y	Y	N	N
Lisnagarvey High School	Y	N	N	N
Little Flower Girls' School	N	N	N	N
Loreto College, Coleraine	N	N	N	N
Loreto Grammar, Omagh	Y	Y	N	N
Magherafelt High School	Y	N	N	N
Malone College	N	N	Y	Y
Mercy College, Belfast	Y	Y	N	N
Mount Lourdes	N	N	Y	Y
Movilla High School	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
New-Bridge Integrated College	Y	Y	N	N
Newry High	N	N	N	N
Oakgrove Integrated College	Y	Y	N	N
Omagh Academy Grammar	N	N	Y	Y
Omagh High	Y	Y	N	N
Our Lady and St Patrick's College	Y	Y	N	N
Parkhall College	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Portora Royal	N	N	N	N
Priory Integrated College	N	N	N	N

School Name	KS4 Course Count Compliant	KS4 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)	Post-16 Course Count Compliant	Post-16 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)
Rainey Endowed Grammar School	N	N	Y	Y
Rathmore	N	N	N	N
Royal School, Armagh	N	N	N	N
Sacred Heart College	Y	Y	N	N
Sacred Heart Grammar School	N	N	Y	Y
Saintfield High School	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
Sperrin Integrated College	N	N	N	N
St Aidan's High School, Enniskillen	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Brigid's College, Londonderry	Y	Y	N	N
St Colman's High School, Ballynahinch	Y	Y	N	N
St Colmcille's High School, Crossgar	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Colm's High School, Magherafelt	Y	Y	N	N
St Colm's High School, Twinbrook	N	N	N	N
St Columban's College	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Columb's College, Londonderry	N	N	Y	Y
St Dominic's Grammar School for Girls	Y	Y	N	N
St Eugene's College	N	N	N	N
St Fanchea's College	N	N	N	N
St Genevieve's High	Y	Y	N	N
St Joseph's Boys' High, Newry	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Joseph's Boys' School, Londonderry	Y	Y	N	N
St Joseph's College, Belfast	Y	Y	N	N
St Joseph's College, Coleraine	N	N	N	N
St Joseph's College, Enniskillen	Y	N	N	N
St Joseph's High, Crossmaglen	Y	Y	N	N
St Louis' Grammar School	N	N	Y	Y
St Mark's High, Newry	Y	Y	N	N
St Mary's Christian Brothers Grammar School	Y	Y	N	N
St Mary's College, Portglenone	N	N	N	N
St Mary's College, Irvinestown	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Mary's Grammar School	N	N	Y	Y
St Mary's High, Newry	Y	Y	N	N
St Mary's High School, Brollagh	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Mary's High School, Limavady	Y	Y	N	N
St Michael's Grammar, Enniskillen	N	N	N	N
St Patrick's & St Brigid's College, Claudy	N	N	No 6th Form	No 6th Form
St Patrick's Academy, Lisburn	Y	Y	N	N
St Patrick's College, Bearnagheeha	N	N	Y	Y

School Name	KS4 Course Count Compliant	KS4 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)	Post-16 Course Count Compliant	Post-16 Compliant (1/3 Applied & 1/3 General)
St Patrick's College, Banbridge	Y	Y	N	N
St Patrick's College, Dungiven	N	N	N	N
St Patrick's Grammar, Armagh	Y	Y	N	N
St Pius X College	Y	Y	N	N
St Roses Dominican College	Y	Y	N	N
Strabane Academy	Y	Y	N	N
Strangford College	Y	Y	N	N
Strathearn	N	N	N	N
Sullivan Upper School	N	N	Y	Y
Wallace High School	Y	Y	N	N

The EF is a key component of the statutory curriculum; it ensures that all learners, in KS4 and post-16, have access to a broad and balanced range of economically relevant and individually engaging courses. Whilst I am keen to retain and build on the benefits accrued thus far, I appreciate that budgetary constraints are creating significant challenges for schools trying to meet these requirements in full. In light of this I will be giving consideration to the EF policy over the coming months including the statutory requirements.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme; and (ii) whether he will, in partnership with the Executive, consider extending this scheme in future years. (AQW 2542/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Delivering Social Change Literacy and Numeracy Signature Programme has been shown to be successful, in particular, in enabling schools to develop effective ways of identifying and targeting underachievement and putting in place appropriate intervention strategies to raise attainment.

A legacy programme has been put in place to disseminate to schools the learning from the Signature Programme. It is for school leaders, within their own resources, to mainstream the approaches to tackling underachievement that have been shown to be effective in many of the schools supported by DSC. I will be exploring how best to take forward the legacy of the signature programme into the future.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education how his Department plans to address the under provision of education in juvenile centres. (AQW 2547/16-21)

Mr Weir: Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre, located in Bangor, is the only Juvenile Justice Centre in Northern Ireland. It has the capacity to hold up to 48 young people aged between 10 and 18 years, held either on remand or after they have been sentenced by a court to custody. The majority of young people detained at any individual point in time will be those on short-term remand placements.

The centre operates a diverse range of educational and vocational provision. Young people are comprehensively assessed on their entry into the Centre to identify their medical, mental health, social and emotional care needs and to determine their educational baseline. Each receives a personal education plan setting out targets for their education and personal development and their ongoing learning is integrated with other interventions to help address offending behaviour and meet any other identified needs.

Woodlands education service has historically been provided by qualified teachers directly employed by the Youth Justice Agency. The service is now under the auspices of the Education Authority (EA) and by the end of the autumn; all existing teaching staff will have transferred to become EA employees. The EA will operate the education and vocation training service as one of its Education Otherwise Than at School (EOTAS) centres, following the same high standards applied to all other EOTAS provision and subject to the same periodic inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the number of applications to special schools; (ii) the number of places allocated; and (iii) the number of places not utilised, in each of the last 3 years. (AQW 2549/16-21)

Mr Weir: The information requested is as follows:

Education Authority	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017
No of Applications*	259	291	314	Not yet available
No of Allocations	255	285	300	Not yet available
No of places not utilised**	-	-	-	-

* Placement is not based on application, but on assessment of need and parental preference.

** The number of children will be dependent on the needs of the group in a class. In this regard, the number of places not utilised cannot always be specified.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline what is being done to move beyond free school meals as an indicator of need; and to take into consideration other issues such as disability and number of pupils for whom English is not their first language.

(AQW 2574/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department uses a wide range of indicators to target social need. Free school meals is one of these and is commonly used as proxy measure of deprivation. However, it must be noted that although FSME is the best indicator we have at present, it is still a proxy measure. When appropriate, alternative measures of deprivation are used by my Department. For example, the Multiple Deprivation Measure and Neighbourhood Renewal Areas are used in relation to a number of its programmes such as Extended Schools and SureStart where need is identified based on the home address of pupils.

Other identified needs (such as Newcomer Pupils, Looked-After children or the specific needs of pupils with Special Educational Needs) are separately targeted and supported, and are not identified as measures of social deprivation.

Free school meals has a number of characteristics that makes it the most reliable indicator for identifying social deprivation i.e.

- it relates to the individual pupil, collecting information that is personal to the pupil's family circumstances, and is therefore more robust than an area-based measure which assumes that everyone in the same area is alike;
- it is updated on an annual basis and is therefore current;
- it is available as part of the census return and is therefore easily gathered at school and pupil level;
- it is capable of independent validation; and
- it is highly correlated with the Multiple Deprivation Measure and with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI).
- It provides an indication of the relative concentration of potentially 'disadvantaged' pupils in a given school in a way that no other indicator currently does.

Officials will continue to consider different measures of need depending on the different contexts.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) what indicators other than academic achievements are being considered for the Programme for Government to assess outcomes for children; and (ii) how does such an indicator apply to a child with significant learning difficulties.

(AQW 2575/16-21)

Mr Weir: The measures identified within the draft Programme for Government (PfG) with respect to educational attainment refer to the performance of the Executive in delivering an effective education system for all children, including those with special educational needs.

However these measures do not encompass all of the qualities of a good education system. Many of the functions of education are reflected in the other PfG indicators: for instance the economic/employment measures and the health and social inclusion measures. These do not necessarily refer to the attainment of qualifications.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline what progress has been made on the creation of 3,000 places for school age childcare targeted at families in need, as detailed in the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare.

(AQW 2586/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Childcare Partnerships, the managing agent for the School Age Childcare Grant (SAC) Scheme, have advised that, as at 16 September 2016, the Scheme is supporting approximately 3,000 childcare places.

44 settings (40%) are located in a disadvantaged area, creating or sustaining approximately 1,100 places.

50 settings (45%) are located in a rural area creating or sustaining approximately 1,500 places.

The same funded setting might be located in an area categorized as disadvantaged and as rural.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline what progress has been made in supporting up to 1000 school age childcare places in rural areas through social enterprises as detailed in the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare.

(AQW 2587/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Childcare Partnerships, the managing agent for the School Age Childcare Grant (SAC) Scheme, have advised that, as at 16 September 2016, the Scheme is supporting approximately 3,000 childcare places.

44 settings (40%) are located in a disadvantaged area, creating or sustaining approximately 1,100 places.

50 settings (45%) are located in a rural area creating or sustaining approximately 1,500 places.

The same funded setting might be located in an area categorized as disadvantaged and as rural.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the improvements that have been made to the Family Support website as detailed in the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare.

(AQW 2588/16-21)

Mr Weir: The first phase of the Childcare Strategy supported a range of improvements to the Family Support NI website to enhance it as a central source of information on childcare and childcare providers operating at local levels. This included creating a new childcare specific search facility. The facility enables parents to search for childcare services in their area and filter the results by a number of relevant categories including types of childcare available and current vacancies.

A social media App was also developed. This enables parents to search for childcare services using their smart phones. The website and App have been receiving in the region of 40,000 hits per month.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the progress that has been made on the development of a training programme to improve and enhance skills across the childcare workforce as detailed in the Executive's Programme for Affordable and Integrated Childcare.

(AQW 2589/16-21)

Mr Weir: Since the launch of the first phase of the Childcare Strategy in September 2013, the local Childcare Partnerships (CCPs) have been working closely with the childcare sector to progress initiatives to enhance the skills of the existing childcare workforce and increase the numbers of trained childcare staff. This has included, for example, support for approximately 350 practitioners to undertake training in Childcare Learning and Development qualifications and the establishment of a Regional Childcare Workforce Group (RCWG). The RCWG, chaired by the CCPs, comprises representatives from the statutory and voluntary sectors as well as employer organisations, and seeks to develop the quality of the early years education and childcare workforces.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education whether the Childcare Strategy Management Forum has been established; and if so to detail its analysis of how the key first actions of the Childcare Strategy are being implemented.

(AQW 2590/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Management Forum proposed in the first phase of the Childcare Strategy is known as the Childcare Strategy Programme Board. It comprises representatives of those Government Departments with a policy interest in childcare along with a representative from the Childcare Partnerships. Since September 2013, there have been fourteen meetings of the Programme Board. These have monitored the progress of the Strategy's Key First Actions (KFAs). Good progress has been made on implementing the KFAs with most regarded as being on track for delivery or completion.

One of the KFAs, relating to rural childminding, has not been taken forward. The responsible department, the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, subsequently developed alternative proposals which were included in the draft Childcare Strategy issued for consultation in July 2015.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education to detail the plans his Department has to promote a single transfer test amongst current test providers.

(AQW 2598/16-21)

Mr Weir: I have tasked my officials to engage with relevant stakeholders to make swift progress to improve the current arrangements. I do not wish to pre-empt the conclusion of that engagement but it is in the best interests of children to find a way forward in good time.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Education whether there is a procedure in place for post-primary schools to apply for an additional placement to accommodate a child, other than Year 8 new intake, in exceptional circumstances; and if so, whether there a specific criteria of what constitutes exceptional circumstances or are all instances treated on a case-by-case basis.

(AQW 2632/16-21)

Mr Weir: There is no such procedure for post-primary schools, however parents of the child in question, can apply to the Exceptional Circumstances Body and each case would be considered on its own merits.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the level of academic underachievement in West Tyrone; (ii) how this compares to other constituencies; and (iii) what specific measures are being taken to improve levels of academic achievement in West Tyrone.

(AQW 2662/16-21)

Mr Weir: The policies and programmes I have in place are realising improvements for our young people at Key Stages, GCSE and A-level. In 2014/15, in West Tyrone, 66.4% of all pupils and 40.3% of pupils entitled to free school meals achieved 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C (or equivalent) including GCSE English and maths. These results are close to the Northern Ireland averages of 66% and 41.3% and show a welcome increase in performance from 2013/14 when figures were 64.7% and 38.6% respectively.

However, significant challenges remain in West Tyrone and elsewhere. Responsibility must lie in the first place with schools. Teachers and school leaders are best placed to identify those pupils at risk of underachievement and, through high quality teaching and learning, identify the most appropriate actions to meet individual pupil needs and raise attainment.

I will continue to focus on those policies that are driving improvement and that support collaboration between schools and teachers to raise standards and share good practice across the school system.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to detail the range of training and professional development opportunities that his Department provides for teachers and classroom assistants that work in Special Education Schools, or with other pupils who have special educational needs.

(AQW 2663/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority which is responsible for delivering SEN training to schools has advised that it provides the following range of Special Educational Needs training and professional development for teachers and classroom assistants that work in special schools (the same opportunities apply to teachers of children with Special Education Needs in mainstream schools unless indicated otherwise):-

Behaviour:

- The Principles of Applied Behaviour Analysis;
- Team Teach (Special Schools);
- Effective Planning for Behaviour Management;
- A Team Approach to Problem Solving; and
- Beginning Teachers' Training in consultation with School Development Service.

Learning Support:

- The Role of the Classroom Assistant to Support Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
- The Role of Assistive Technology in Supporting Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorder;
- Creating a Communication Friendly Classroom;
- Elklan Training;
- Communicating Through Play;
- Makaton Training Foundation and Enhanced (Special Schools);
- Developing Attention and Listening Skills;
- Sensory Modulation Programme;
- Numicon Training;
- Building Blocks of Child Development;
- Circle Time;
- The Role of Assistive Technology in Supporting Pupils with SEN;
- Deaf Awareness Training;
- The Difficulties Experienced by a Pupil with a Vision Impairment and Strategies to Support Them;
- Introduction to Braille;
- British Sign Language level 1 and 2; and
- Summer School for Classroom Assistants.

Special Education:

- Supporting Children with SEN through the Framework of the Code of Practice;
- A Team Approach to Problem Solving;
- SEND Training (to commence this academic year);
- Supporting Pupils with SEN for Beginning Teachers/Teachers;

- Supporting Pupils with Co-ordination Difficulties/Developmental Co-ordination Disorder;
- Manual Handling Training: Core, Refresher and Evaluation (Special Schools);
- Pre and Post Inspection Support;
- SEN Policy Training;
- Clarification of the Roles and Responsibilities of Adult Assistants in Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs;
- An Adult Assistant's Understanding of SEN and How it Affects Children in School;
- Strategies for Adult Assistants for Including and Supporting these Children in the Classroom;
- Adult Assistants' Contribution to Planning, Monitoring and Review of Education Plans and Possible Feedback/Recording Systems for use in the Classroom with the Class Teacher;
- Training on the Effective Management of Additional Adult Assistants;
- Regional Capacity Building Training Programme for SENCOs;
- Training on the Education Plan Process; and
- Training on the Implementation of Q Skills (Special Schools).

In addition, staff from Special Schools are welcome to attend the Termly SEN Clusters for SENCOs.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA)

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) provides the following range of Special Educational Needs training and professional development for teachers and classroom assistants that work in special schools and teachers and classroom assistants for SEN pupils in mainstream schools:-

Examinations:

- Information events for teachers and assessors that deliver educational testing in post-primary settings (to gain or refresh knowledge of the principles and practice of specialist teacher assessment and requirements for access arrangements for GCSE and GCE).

Curriculum:

- A small team of CCEA designated officers provide a wide range of support for special and mainstream schools in all aspects of SEN. This includes:
 - research and development of curriculum, assessment and qualifications;
 - training and professional development; and
 - advice and in-school support.
- Training on Quest; the Q Skills; the SEN Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework; and Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD);
- Booklets and guidance on Identifying and Supporting Learners with SEBD which are available on the CCEA website; and
- Online courses including:
 - Q Skills;
 - SEN Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities; and
 - A Window on Special.

Schools are also able to avail of training for individual teachers or whole school directed time sessions on Quest; the Q Skills; the SEN Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities framework; Gifted & Talented; or SEBD.

As well as specific SEN training, all training offered by CCEA takes cognisance of special educational needs.

SEN Framework

In addition to the training outlined above, capacity building is required in the new SEN Framework for a range of stakeholders such as EA staff, school staff and Boards of Governors. The Department of Education has provided the EA with £300k this financial year to begin to design and deliver the training on the new SEN Framework.

Autism Specific Training

Autism specific training for teachers, to build the capacity of schools to effectively meet the needs of children with autism, is delivered by the EA and the Middletown Centre for Autism.

Initial Teacher Education

Initial Teacher Education courses provided by our local Higher Education Institutions contain SEN training as an integral part of their programmes.

Other Provision

There are also many other organisations that provide SEN training and schools are free to supplement any training provided by statutory agencies. My Department does not hold details of any training provided by independent organisations.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Education to detail the economic appraisal of the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme. (AQW 2677/16-21)

Mr Weir: A business case, demonstrating economic justification, was developed for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme (the Scheme). This placed particular emphasis on the assessment of need for the Scheme; the associated costs and benefits, both monetary and non-monetary; options for the Scheme and the assessment of risks.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Education whether he will publish the Equality Impact Assessment for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme. (AQW 2678/16-21)

Mr Weir: A copy of the Equality Screening has been published on the Department of Education website. <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/node/20324>.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister of Education to outline the oversight and checks undertaken by his Department to demonstrate the economic justification for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme. (AQW 2679/16-21)

Mr Weir: A business case, demonstrating economic justification was developed for the Investing in the Teaching Workforce Scheme (the Scheme). This placed particular emphasis on the assessment of need for the Scheme; the associated costs and benefits, both monetary and non-monetary; options for the Scheme and the assessment of risks.

The business case was developed in accordance with the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure, Appraisal and Evaluation (NIGEAE). NIGEAE is the primary guide for Northern Ireland Departments on the appraisal, evaluation, approval and management of policies, programmes and projects.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for an update on the future plans of the building that was previously Magherafelt Primary School. (AQW 2696/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for the former site of Magherafelt Primary School.

The EA is actively considering alternative uses for the site/property. Subject to the outcome of that process, the EA will either seek to redevelop the site/property for other educational use or dispose of it in accordance with the guidance from Land and Property Services.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to outline the legislative restrictions for buildings that were previously used as schools; broken down by sector. (AQW 2698/16-21)

Mr Weir: Articles 105 and 106 of the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order 1986 [No. 594 (N.I. 3)] contain provisions relating to the acquisition and disposal of land for controlled schools.

All public sector bodies are also bound by the principles in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland and the guidance from Land and Property Services on the disposal of surplus public sector property. The guidance requires public bodies to identify and release surplus property with the least possible delay, subject to the need to realise best value.

Former schools in the maintained, Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated sectors are not owned by the Department of Education (DE); they are the property of the Trustees and on closure of a school the responsibility for the building reverts to the Trustees.

While schools in these sectors are operational, the school is vested in the Trustees, which allows capital grants to be paid for the premises. The vesting documents also mean that the premises cannot be disposed of without DE's consent. When the school closes, clawback of the grants paid will be due to DE, as outlined in the Voluntary Schools Building Grant Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1993 (S.R. 1993 No 457).

For older schools there may be restrictions on disposal within the Leases for Schools (Ireland) Act 1881 or the Educational Endowments (Ireland) Act 1885.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether (i) there is any co-ordination of childcare and education within the Department; and (ii) childcare is fully integrated within the new departmental structures in terms of policy and unit co-ordination. (AQW 2706/16-21)

Mr Weir: Policy responsibility for childcare transferred to the Department of Education (DE) on 9 May 2016.

Childcare is fully integrated in DE. It is part of the Youth, Early Years and Childcare Directorate. The new arrangements provide an opportunity to align childcare with the suite of DE Early Education and learning programmes to ensure we maximise the complementarity of these services in the interest of children and families. The Childcare Strategy is currently being finalised in the context of this wider Departmental remit, the emerging Programme for Government and the responses received during consultation on the draft Childcare Strategy.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to enhance the primary school curriculum by requiring schools to deliver lessons on mental wellbeing.

(AQW 2731/16-21)

Mr Weir: The statutory curriculum clearly states that pupils should be taught about the importance of learning about mental health and wellbeing.

In the primary school curriculum, managing feelings and emotions is a compulsory element of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and provides opportunities for pupils to better understand their own feelings and the feelings of others, as well as how to sustain their health, growth and wellbeing.

Also, you may be aware of the Department's 'I-Matter' programme, which is about addressing how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health and well-being for all pupils. The materials produced to date under the Programme include subjects such as 'stress and anxiety' and 'feelings' and are widely used by schools, across the youth sector, local libraries, GP surgeries and parent organisations. The Department intends to review the materials available over the coming months with a view to adding additional material on promoting positive emotional health and well-being.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has carried out any research into the hidden cost of education, including the financial burden on parents relating to voluntary contributions, being school trips, paying for invited speakers and bringing in materials and ingredients for coursework.

(AQW 2747/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department has not carried out any research into the hidden cost of education.

Schools in Northern Ireland are entitled to request or invite voluntary contributions from parents for the benefit of the school or any school activities.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) any current court action that his Department is responding to; and (ii) how many court actions were settled out of court.

(AQW 2751/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) My Department is currently responding to five court actions; as the action is ongoing I am not able to provide more details at this time.
- (ii) My Department settled six court actions out of court during the last 2 years.

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education to detail any capital projects planned, broken down by constituency, over the next three years.

(AQW 2758/16-21)

Mr Weir: There are several ongoing capital programmes to improve accommodation across the schools' and youth estate funded from the Department's capital budget. In addition, the Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides an additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects.

The tables below provide a list of capital projects that have been selected to advance in planning and will continue to progress over the next three years under each of the various programmes, broken down by constituency.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate.

Major Capital Investment Programme

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency	Current status
Elmgrove School and nursery	Belfast East	In planning
Edenderry Nursery	Belfast North	On site
Glenwood Primary School	Belfast North	In planning
St Patrick's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	In planning

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency	Current status
St Vincent de Paul Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	In planning
Gaelscoil Eanna, Newtownabbey	Belfast North	In planning
Seaview Primary School, Belfast	Belfast North	In planning
Methodist College, Belfast	Belfast South	In planning
Scoil An Droichid Primary School, Belfast	Belfast South	In planning
Breda Academy, Belfast	Belfast South	In planning
Colasite Feirste, Belfast	Belfast West	On site
Holy Evangelist's Primary School, Twinbrook	Belfast West	In planning
Corran Integrated Primary School	East Antrim	In planning
Woodburn Primary School	East Antrim	In planning
Abbey Community College	East Antrim	In planning
St Killian's College, Ballymena	East Antrim	In planning
Islandmagee Primary School	East Antrim	In planning
Rossmar Special School, Limavady	East Londonderry	In planning
Our Lady of Fatima Primary School	East Londonderry	In planning
Roe Valley Integrated Primary School, Limavady	East Londonderry	In planning
Enniskillen Model Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
St Patrick's Academy, Dungannon	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	On site
Devenish College/Lisnaskea College, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
Portora Royal/Collegiate, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
Gaelscoil Aodha Rua, Dungannon	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
Foyle College, Londonderry	Foyle	On site
Ebrington Primary School	Foyle	On site
Ardnashee School and College (Belmont House Special School)	Foyle	In planning
Gaelscoil Ui Neill	Mid Ulster	In planning
Holy Trinity College, Cookstown	Mid Ulster	In planning
Edendork Primary School	Mid Ulster	In planning
St Joseph's and St James Primary School, Poyntzpass	Newry and Armagh	In planning
St Joseph's High School, Crossmaglen	Newry and Armagh	In planning
St Peter's Primary School, Dungannon	Newry and Armagh	In planning
St Malachy's Primary School, Armagh	Newry and Armagh	In planning
Castle Tower Special School	North Antrim	On site
Braidside Integrated Primary School	North Antrim	In planning
Mary Queen of Peace (St Mary's /Glenravel Primary School)	North Antrim	In planning
Cullybackey College	North Antrim	In planning
Dunclug High School	North Antrim	In planning
Crawfordsburn Primary School	North Down	In planning
Parkhall Integrated College, Antrim	South Antrim	On site
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor	South Down	On site

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency	Current status
Down High School	South Down	In planning
Iveagh Primary School, Rathfriland	South Down	In planning
amalgamation - St Mary's PS, Annalong; St Joseph's PS, Killeel; Moneydarragh PS, Annalong	South Down	In planning
Drumlins Integrated Primary School	Strangford	On site
Tannaghmore Primary School	Upper Bann	On site
St Mary's Primary School. Banbridge	Upper Bann	On site
St Ronan's (St Mary's, St Paul's and St Michael's), Lurgan	Upper Bann	In planning
Portadown Integrated Primary School	Upper Bann	In planning
Lismore Comprehensive, Lurgan	Upper Bann	In planning
King's Park Primary School, Lurgan	Upper Bann	In planning
Arvalee School and Resource Centre	West Tyrone	On site
Strabane Academy	West Tyrone	In planning
Omagh Integrated Primary School	West Tyrone	In planning
Gaelscoil Ui Dhochartaigh, Strabane	West Tyrone	In planning
Gaelscoil na gCrann Primary School, Omagh	West Tyrone	In planning

School Enhancement Programme

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency	Current status
Strandtown Primary School	Belfast East	In planning
St Malachy's College, Belfast	Belfast North	In planning
St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey	Belfast North	On site
Malone Integrated College, Belfast	Belfast South	In planning
Victoria College, Belfast	Belfast South	On site
Methodist College, Belfast	Belfast South	On site
John Paul II Primary School	Belfast West	On site
De La Salle College, Belfast	Belfast West	In planning
St Michael's College, Enniskillen	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
Mount Lourdes Grammar School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	In planning
Integrated College, Dungannon	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	On site
Willow Bridge Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	On site
St Columb's College, Londonderry	Foyle	On site
Broadbridge Primary School. Londonderry	Foyle	On site
New Buildings Primary School, Londonderry	Foyle	On site
Friends School, Lisburn	Lagan Valley	On site
St Patrick's Academy, Lisburn	Lagan Valley	On site
Wallace High School	Lagan Valley	On site
Rainey Endowed School, Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	On site
St Joseph's Grammar School, Donaghmore	Mid Ulster	On site
Anahorish Primary School, Toomebridge	Mid Ulster	On site
St Mary's Grammar School, Magherafelt	Mid Ulster	On site

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency	Current status
St Patrick's Grammar School, Armagh	Newry and Armagh	On site
Our Lady's Grammar School, Newry	Newry and Armagh	In planning
Killean Primary School, Newry	Newry and Armagh	On site
Rathore Special School, Newry	Newry and Armagh	On site
The Armstrong Primary School, Armagh	Newry and Armagh	On site
Dalriada School, Ballymoney	North Antrim	On site
St Louis Grammar School, Ballymena	North Antrim	On site
Slemish College, Ballymena	North Antrim	In planning
Ballymoney High School	North Antrim	On site
Sullivan Upper School, Holywood	North Down	On site
Ballyclare Secondary School	South Antrim	On site
Sacred Heart Grammar School, Newry	South Down	On site
St Mark's High School, Warrenpoint	South Down	On site
New Bridge Integrated College, Banbridge	Upper Bann	In planning
Ceara Special School, Lurgan	Upper Bann	In planning
Donard Special School, Banbridge	Upper Bann	On site
Millington Primary School, Portadown	Upper Bann	On site

Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) Programme (New projects in Integrated Sector)

Name of School	Parliamentary Constituency
Forge Integrated Primary School, Belfast	Belfast South
Ulidia College, Carrickfergus	East Antrim
Millstrand Integrated Primary School, Portstewart	East Londonderry
North Coast Integrated College, Coleraine	East Londonderry
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Rowandale Integrated Primary School, Moira	Lagan Valley
Fort Hill Central Integrated Primary School, Lisburn	Lagan Valley
Fort Hill Integrated College, Lisburn	Lagan Valley
Phoenix Integrated Primary School, Cookstown	Mid Ulster
Bangor Central Integrated Primary School	North Down
Priory College, Holywood	North Down
Shimna College, Newcastle	South Down
Millennium Integrated Primary School, Carryduff	Strangford
Strangford College	Strangford
New Bridge Integrated College, Loughbrickland	Upper Bann

Shared Education Campus Programme (All now funded under FSA)

Project Name	Schools involved	Constituency
Limavady Shared Education Campus	Limavady High School and St Mary's High School, Limavady	East Londonderry
Moy Shared Education Campus	Moy Regional Primary School, St John's Primary School, Moy and Moy Area Playgroup	Fermanagh and South Tyrone

Project Name	Schools involved	Constituency
Brookeborough Shared Education Campus	St Mary's Primary School, Brookeborough and Brookeborough Primary School	Fermanagh and South Tyrone
Ballycastle Shared Education Campus	Ballycastle High School and Cross and Passion College, Ballycastle	North Antrim
Duneane/Moneynick Shared Education Campus	Duneane Primary School and Moneynick Primary School	South Antrim

Youth Capital Works Programme

Youth Organisation	Constituency
Ballysillan Youth for Christ Drop-in	Belfast North
John Paul 2 Youth Club, Belfast	Belfast North
Ardoyne Youth Club, Belfast	Belfast North
Corpus Christi Youth Club, Belfast	Belfast West
Catholic Guides of Ireland, Northern Region, Belfast	Belfast West
Holy Trinity Youth Centre, Belfast	Belfast West
Newhill Youth & Community Centre, Belfast	Belfast West
Conway Youth Centre, Belfast	Belfast West
314 NI Girls Brigade, Monkstown	East Antrim
Cladagh Glen Centre, Fermanagh	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
1st Tyrone Scouts, Dungannon	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Share Discovery Village, Lisnaskea	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
St Michael's Scout Group, Enniskillen	Fermanagh & South Tyrone
St Mary's Youth Club, Londonderry	Foyle
Glenview Community Centre, Londonderry	Foyle
Ebrington Church Youth Council, Londonderry	Foyle
St Patrick's Youth Centre, Donaghmore	Mid Ulster
Magnet Young Adult Centre, Newry	Newry & Armagh
Glarryford Young Farmers Club, Glarryford	North Antrim
Loughgiel Community Association, Loughgiel	North Antrim
Comber Youth for Christ, Comber	Strangford
Clann Eireann Youth Club, Lurgan	Upper Bann
Portadown YMCA, Portadown	Upper Bann
Goal Line Youth Trust, Portadown	Upper Bann
3rd Tyrone Scouts, Strabane	West Tyrone
Ardstraw Presbyterian Church Youth Council	West Tyrone

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Childcare Strategy.
(AQW 2770/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Executive's Childcare Strategy is being delivered on a phased basis. The first phase was launched in September 2013. This first phase included 15 Key First actions designed to address the priority childcare needs identified through research and during an initial consultation with parents, children and childcare stakeholders.

School Age Childcare (such as breakfast clubs, after school clubs and summer schemes) was identified as a key area of unmet childcare need. The School Age Childcare Grant Scheme, launched March 2014, is the most ambitious of the Strategy's initial interventions. It has, to date, allocated approximately

£6 million to support more than 3,000 low cost childcare places. Disadvantaged families and families living in rural areas are among the principal beneficiaries.

In addition, the first phase of the Strategy has supported the development of childcare services for children with special needs, including supporting a summer scheme for children for the past four years. The first phase has also made information on local childcare services better and more readily available to parents.

Development of the full Childcare Strategy began in 2014 and has involved ongoing engagement with the main childcare stakeholders as well as further, extensive consultation in the second half of last year. The findings of this consultation exercise will help shape the content of the final version of the Childcare Strategy, which I plan to finalise in the coming months.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education for an update on the new build for Holy Trinity Secondary School, Cookstown. (AQO 197/16-21)

Mr Weir: Holy Trinity College was included in the major capital investment announcement of 22 January 2013 as one of 22 projects to advance in planning with associated total estimated costs of some £220 million.

Initial work to progress the project was delayed due to the submission of a Development Proposal to increase the school's enrolment to 1,300 pupils which was approved in March 2015.

A Business Case has, just last week (8 September 2016), been approved by the Department of Finance for a new build post-primary school on the existing site.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education how many children in Upper Bann have received a statement for (i) ADHD; and (ii) Autism over the last five years; and what the average time is for the process to be completed. (AQW 2784/16-21)

Mr Weir:

(i) ADHD

In the last 5 years, a total of 12 children in the Upper Bann area have received a Statement where Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADD/ADHD) has been identified as either a primary or additional SEN. The average length for completion of Statutory Assessment is 32 weeks. Valid exceptions to the statutory 26 week timeframe have been recorded in 11 of these cases.

(ii) Autism

In the last 5 years, a total of 75 children in the Upper Bann area have received a Statement where Autism Specific Disorder (ASD)/Asperger Syndrome has been identified as either a primary or additional SEN. The average length for completion of Statutory Assessment is 29.7 weeks. Valid exceptions to the statutory 26 week timeframe have been recorded in 58 of these cases.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans to investigate and address the problems presenting in primary schools with over-usage of tablet/mobile technology with regards to speech and motor skills. (AQW 2786/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is aware that there are a number of scholarly and media articles of the use of tablets and mobile technology in schools covering a range of issues. We are also aware of the report published in May 2016 by the Association of Teachers and Lecturers on the use of tablet computers in schools which includes a reference to children coming to school with poor speech and significantly reduced language skills as well as poor social skills and underdeveloped motor skills.

However, at present, I have no plans to commission research on this issue.

Ms J McCann asked the Minister of Education for an update on the CCMS area plan for West Belfast. (AQW 2797/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has overall operational responsibility for Area Planning and works closely with the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), as planning authority for the Catholic maintained sector and other sectoral support bodies, to develop a single Area Plan covering all sectors. The EA's existing Area Plan and supporting action plan, which has currency until March 2017, does not include any plans to reshape maintained primary provision in West Belfast but does note that CCMS is currently engaging with the relevant school trustees of maintained secondary schools in this area about the shape of future provision in order to develop options for consultation.

The draft EA Area Plan for 2017-2020 is intended to be published for public consultation this autumn, with the results of consultation informing the future priorities for action to ensure that education provision is shaped to meet the future needs of an area. It is expected that any proposal emerging from current CCMS engagement in West Belfast on post-primary provision will be further developed in the 2017-2020 planning period.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact that the UK leaving the European Union will have on local education.

(AQW 2806/16-21)

Mr Weir: It is too early to comment in detail on the implications for these areas. Further work will be required to quantify the potential impact as details emerge from the negotiations the UK Government will be having with the EU.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail literacy levels, broken down by school or area.

(AQW 2808/16-21)

Mr Weir: At a system level, information relating to literacy is collated at the end of each of the key stages of education.

In 2014/15, by the end of Key Stage 2, an estimated 76.8% of pupils achieved the expected level of progression for Communication (English) in Northern Ireland. Figures are based on a sample proportion of schools and it is therefore not possible to provide a further breakdown by school or geographical area.

Information on the qualifications of all school leavers in Northern Ireland is collected annually and includes pupils that studied GCSE English at the end of Key Stage 4. In 2014/15, 94.0% of school leavers in Northern Ireland achieved grades A*-G in GCSE English. The below table provides the number and percentage of school leavers in each district council who achieved grades A*- G in GCSE English in 2014/15.

Number and percentage of school leavers achieving GCSE English at grades A* - G by district council of pupil residence, 2014/15(1)

District Council(2)	Achieving GCSE English A* - G		Total School Leavers
	Number	%	Number
Antrim and Newtownabbey	1520	95.7	1588
Ards and North Down	1618	93.7	1726
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	2266	94.7	2393
Belfast	3362	95.3	3526
Causeway Coast and Glens	1555	92.4	1683
Derry City and Strabane	2051	95.2	2155
Fermanagh and Omagh	1331	91.5	1455
Lisburn and Castlereagh	1520	94.3	1612
Mid and East Antrim	1627	96.2	1691
Mid Ulster	1808	93.4	1935
Newry, Mourne and Down	2256	91.7	2460
Invalid/Missing/Unknown Postcodes	114	83.2	137
Total Northern Ireland	21028	94.0	22361

Source: School Leavers Survey

Notes:

- 1 Data exclude special and independent schools.
- 2 District council of pupil residence is based on the residential postcode of each individual pupil.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Education to detail the numbers of pupils that left hools at the end of Year 13 having not finished their course of study, broken down by category for leaving and area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2809/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland.

However, information on educational pathways or specific courses of study for individual students is not collected. It is therefore not possible to determine how many pupils left school education before completing their course of study.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) to detail the overall number and percentage of pupils currently in receipt of Educational Maintenance Allowance; (ii) to outline why there are differing amounts received; and (iii) to outline the parental income thresholds for determining eligibility or otherwise.

(AQW 2819/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) In the 2015/16 school year there were 11,699 pupils in receipt of the means-tested Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This represents approximately 37% of the total number of pupils in post-compulsory education.
- (ii) Since 2013, all eligible students receive the same weekly allowance of £30 which is paid every two weeks, providing they meet the school's attendance requirements. There are also two performance based bonuses of £100 normally paid out in January and June.
- (iii) Students are eligible to apply for an EMA if:
 - their household income is £20,500 or less for households with one dependent child;
 - their household income is £22,500 or less for households with more than one dependent child.

Ms Armstrong asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many contracts his Department has for Home to School transport; and (ii) as of 5 September 2016, how many of these are still in existence.

(AQW 2854/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education does not hold any contracts for Home to School transport. These are negotiated directly between the Education Authority and various operators.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) whether staff from his Department visit early years and childcare settings; and (ii) to outline the frequency of these visits.

(AQW 2860/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education and Training Inspectorate conduct an annual inspection programme in early years settings; in addition inspectors assigned to early years settings on a geographical district basis carry out a range of other inspection visits as necessary, including when new settings open. Inspectors only visit private and voluntary childcare settings with DE- funded places. Each early years setting is visited and inspected, in the inspection programme, every seven years, unless through risk assessment and the follow-up process more frequent visits are required.

Departmental officials also make annual visits to a small sample of early years settings as part of a verification audit of extended services funding allocated to eligible voluntary and private pre-school education settings. In addition, officials may make visits to pre-school and other settings in response to invitations.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to detail the planned capital investment in schools in North Down in the next five years.

(AQW 2862/16-21)

Mr Weir: In March 2014, a list of schools to benefit from a refurbishment or extension project, each valued between £500,000 and £4,000,000, was announced under the Department's School Enhancement Programme (SEP). This included a scheme at Sullivan Upper School, Holywood, providing for a new multi-purpose sports hall, synthetic pitch and changing facilities at an estimated cost of £2.9m. Work has commenced on site and it is hoped to complete by the end of 2017. I am currently considering the merits of making a further call for new schemes to progress under the SEP.

On 15 March 2016, 10 projects in the primary sector were announced to advance in planning under the Department's Major Capital Investment Programme including a new eight classroom school for Crawfordsburn Primary at an estimated cost of £4m.

The Fresh Start Agreement (FSA) provides the Executive with additional earmarked funding stream for new shared and integrated education capital projects. The first tranche of projects to benefit from this dedicated UK government funding stream were announced on 23 March 2016 and included three schools in North Down - Bangor Central Integrated Primary School, Priory Integrated College in Holywood and Strangford Integrated College in Carrowdore.

All of the major capital investment projects announced in March 2016 are in the early stages of planning and will continue to progress over the next five years.

In addition, there is a substantive programme of work progressing under the Minor Capital Works Programme across the schools' estate. Due to the reactive nature and the volume of these works it is not possible to give a breakdown of projects planned, over the next five years. At present only schemes that meet inescapable statutory requirements such as Health and Safety, Fire Protection and statutory obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act, are progressing to delivery.

The Education Authority has confirmed that the following schools in the controlled sector are in receipt of capital investment for Minor works in the current financial year:

- Holywood Nursery School is receiving a new single modular building;
- Holywood Primary School has received a new double modular building; and
- Towerview Primary School will be provided with a two classroom extension.

In addition, I can advise that the following Minor Works schemes are planned in the non-controlled sector within the 2016/17 and 2017/18 financial years:

- Additional Accommodation for St Patrick's Primary School, Holywood, at an estimated cost £360k;

- Toilet Refurbishment (estimated cost £266k) and replacement mobile classroom (c£190k) at St Comgall's Primary School in Bangor;
- A replacement mobile (estimated cost £240k) for St Malachy's Primary School in Bangor;
- A double mobile (estimated cost £240k) for St Columbanus' College, Bangor; and
- Refurbishment of a pitch (estimated cost £174k) at Sullivan Upper in Holywood.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Education to outline the rationale for his Department's statement that a cross-border residential centre for children with Autism is not a key focus.

(AQO 195/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Middletown Centre for Autism provides an excellent service and plays a vital role in meeting the needs of children with autism. My Department's current focus for the Centre is the delivery of the outreach learning support and assessment service, the training and advisory service and the research and information service.

The current service model has been evaluated by NI and ROI inspectors as 'impacting significantly on the education and life experiences of referred pupils, their teachers and parents.'

The outreach learning support and assessment service, developed following the pause in funding in 2009, is fundamentally the same support as was originally intended, but delivered within the child's home and school setting, instead of on site at the Middletown Centre. In addition this service is having a wider impact for other children with autism attending the school by enhancing the whole school practice for autism.

The Centre has advised that whilst a residential facility would be of value to a small number of children, the Centre's current outreach intervention work is having a much more immediate and prolonged impact not just on children and young people with autism that are referred, but also on their families, school staff and other pupils.

Two joint inspection reports have confirmed that the services delivered by the Centre are of an exceptional standard; noting that the intensive support has led to improved outcomes for the pupils both at school and at home.

Parents whose children have availed of the intensive outreach service commented on the life changing benefits it has provided; and importantly I had the opportunity to speak directly with parents and children on my recent visit to the Centre. I was moved to hear of the progress that the young people had made as a result of the support received.

Dr Farry asked the Minister of Education to outline the terms of reference for his review into the provision of special educational needs.

(AQO 196/16-21)

Mr Weir: Firstly, I should make clear that it is the Education Authority (EA) which is undertaking the review of nursery provision in special schools, as the body with statutory responsibility for making provision for children with special educational needs (SEN).

I can advise the member that the EA Board has agreed an Implementation Plan, outlining the processes that will be followed to carry out the review. Indeed, I understand that the Plan has now been shared with the Education Committee.

Importantly, the Implementation Plan confirms that consultation and engagement with key stakeholders will be integral to the delivery of the review.

I understand that Terms of Reference for the strategic review were agreed at the EA's Children and Young People's Service Committee on 8 September, and that these will be forwarded to the Department once they have been ratified by the EA Board.

I have asked my officials to closely monitor the progress of this review to ensure that the EA delivers on its commitments.

The EA Board will also want to assure itself that the review will be delivered within the agreed timescales; namely, commencing implementation of new arrangements from September 2017.

I can assure Members that no long term decision on this matter will be made prior to completion of the review.

Ms Dillon asked the Minister of Education to outline the plans he has to address educational underachievement, particularly among young people from socially-deprived backgrounds.

(AQO 198/16-21)

Mr Weir: While recent statistics demonstrate a continued upward trend in the performance of our school leavers, there is still a need to address low performance and the significant gaps that remain between our most and least deprived pupils; between boys and girls; and between Protestant boys and their Catholic peers.

We also need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes so that more of our young people leave school with these key skills.

One of my key priorities is to drive more ambitious improvement in every school and in every sector so that more of our young people achieve and progress.

I will focus on those policies that are driving improvement and which aim to support schools and teachers in their work to raise standards and overcome the barriers to learning which some pupils face.

I intend to work closely with schools, early years and childcare providers, the youth service and education stakeholders to ensure that together we can meet the needs and nurture the aspirations of our children and young people.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education, given that 9 of the 10 Early Years groups in North Antrim that applied for pathway funding received a score below the cut-off threshold, to outline how both his Department and Early Years can guide and support these groups.

(AQO 199/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Pathway Fund is targeted at those settings assessed to be providing services for young children in areas with the highest level of need and in line with the published criteria. It therefore prioritises the financial support available. 78 out of 286 early years settings, across NI, that applied to the new Fund were allocated over £2.4million funding.

The purpose of the Pathway Fund is to support new or additional provision. It is not intended to supplement or duplicate other sources of funding.

I appreciate that any change from a closed fund to a more open scheme will impact on settings differently. I want to ensure that those settings not assessed as having sufficiently demonstrated the highest levels of need, according to the criteria, can access support and advice on their application and will be signposted, where possible, to other potential sources of funding.

The Early Years Organisation, which administers the Pathway Fund, has been commissioned to take this forward and has been engaging with groups on both a collective and individual basis.

All applicants were invited to attend feedback clinics organised by the Early Years Organisation. Three of the groups in North Antrim attended a feedback session.

Seven groups in North Antrim, previously in receipt of the closed Early Years Fund, that were not successful in their application for Pathway Funding, were eligible for Transitional funding to the end of June this year.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the 2016-17 Aggregated Schools Budget for primary schools in Upper Bann.

(AQO 200/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Aggregated Schools' Budget (ASB) available for distribution to the Nursery & Primary funding stream was 0.5% more in 2016-17, compared to 2015-16.

Across all primary schools in the Upper Bann constituency, delegated budgets are 2.0% higher in 2016-17, compared to the previous financial year. In part this reflects the level of the ASB share to this funding stream, alongside an increase in the number of primary pupils being educated in schools. Whilst the number of pupils in all nursery & primary schools increased by 1.8%, nursery & primary school pupil numbers in the Upper Bann constituency increased by 2.8%.

The level of funding for individual schools will reflect overall funding available for distribution and any changes in the profile of the school for 2016-17 compared to 2015-16 including, for example, pupil numbers and characteristics.

I am conscious that funding is a significant issue for all schools and that this creates difficult choices and ongoing challenges for schools in seeking to remain within budget.

It is my intention to give further consideration to the overall budget position with a view to identifying what, if any, additional funding can be made available to schools this year.

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Education how both his Department and the Education Authority are addressing the increasing numbers of pupils diagnosed as being on the autistic disorder spectrum.

(AQO 201/16-21)

Mr Weir: I acknowledge the increase in the prevalence of autism in school age children and I am committed to ensuring that every child, including those with autism spectrum disorder receives a high quality education that enables them to fulfil their potential.

The responsibility for diagnosis of autism in children rests with the Department of Health; however access to support for pupils with autism is not dependent on a formal health diagnosis.

Funding to the Education Authority ensures that there is a range of educational provision to support children with SEN, including autism. This includes mainstream provision, learning support centres attached to mainstream schools and special school provision. The Authority is working to enhance autism specific learning support centre provision throughout the region.

The Education Authority's Autism Advisory and Intervention Service provides support to pupils and schools through training and advice to teachers, individual interventions with pupils and also provides support to parents.

In addition my department provides funding to The Middletown Centre for Autism, which has enabled it to expand its programme of direct support and intervention to children with complex autism who are referred by the Education Authority and provide professional and parental training, and research services.

Since the launch of the NI Executive Autism Strategy and Action Plan, my Department has been working closely with the Education Authority and the Middletown Centre for Autism and other departments on implementation of actions. These include delivering training programmes for teachers, educational professionals, youth workers and parents and providing

effective support for pupils with autism. Formal arrangements are also in place for collaborative working between the autism services in education and health.

My department will ensure that the Education Authority continues to deliver effective provision for the growing number of children with autism

Mr Smith asked the Minister of Education for an update on recent curricular developments in vocational education.
(AQO 202/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is not aware of any curricular developments in vocational education as vocational (professional and technical) qualifications are properly delivered in Further Education (FE) colleges and Training Organisations which fall within the remit of the Department for the Economy.

My Department is responsible for the statutory curriculum delivered in schools of which the Entitlement Framework (EF) is a key part. It ensures that all young people, in Key Stage 4 and Post-16, regardless of where they live or which school they attend, have equality of access to a broad and balanced range of economically relevant and individually engaging courses.

The EF requires all post primary schools to provide pupils with access to a minimum of 24 courses at KS4 and 27 courses at Post-16; of which at least one third must be general and one third applied.

Responsibility for the selection of courses offered in order to meet this statutory duty rests with individual schools.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the local GCSE results in 2015-16, compared to results in England and Wales.
(AQO 203/16-21)

Mr Weir: Based on provisional results for Northern Ireland as a whole, produced by the Joint Council for Qualifications, there continues to be a very strong performance by learners here at both GCSE and A level. These figures include all examination entries by school pupils, FE colleges and adult learners. It is important that we celebrate and acknowledge their achievements.

GCSE and A-level attainment in NI compares favourably to performance in England and Wales.

For example, at GCSE A*-A, Northern Ireland achieved 29.1% compared with England 20.3% and Wales 19.4%

At GCSE A*-C, Northern Ireland did even better, having achieved 79.1% compared to both England and Wales achieving 66.6%.

At A level, once again the performance here is to be warmly welcomed. At A*-A, Northern Ireland achieved 29.5% compared to England 25.8% and Wales 22.7%.

At A level A*-C, Northern Ireland achieved 83.4% compared with 77.5% in England and 73.8% in Wales.

These results are very encouraging but we cannot become complacent. There remains unacceptable achievement gaps at all levels in our system and I intend to do all I can to tackle that.

Mr Murphy asked the Minister of Education how his Department plans to ensure full take-up of school uniform grants and free school meals.
(AQO 204/16-21)

Mr Weir: Free school meals (FSM) and school uniform grants provide vitally important support for non working and low income families with some of the financial barriers which they face in seeking to ensure their children have access to and can benefit from a good education.

I am keen to ensure that parents/guardians of every child who is eligible for a FSM and uniform grant establishes that entitlement.

My Department works in partnership with the Education Authority (EA) and individual schools to take various steps to promote both applications for and uptake of FSM and the uniform grant.

To encourage parents to check their eligibility and to increase awareness, the EA issues press releases, sends out renewal applications and letters to parents, and distributes display posters to schools, Social Security Offices, Citizens Advice and libraries.

Within schools there are a range of activities undertaken to encourage uptake of FSM including menus are sent home with pupils and promoted through school websites, theme days and taster sessions are arranged for parents and pupils and the uptake of FSM meals against entitlement is monitored to identify particular issues.

Consideration is also given to ways of improving the school meals experience by reducing queuing time, improving the variety and quality of food and improving the dining environment and experience, as these factors can impact on a decision to avail of a FSM.

The Department also issues a press release before the start of the school year to encourage parents who think they might be eligible for a FSM to apply. My officials will continue to work closely with the EA and schools to continue to promote uptake of FSM and uniform grants.

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Education to outline his Department's work in the greater Shankill area.
(AQO 205/16-21)

Mr Weir: In the current financial year, my Department has provided funding as follows:

Shankill Sure Start Project has been allocated £607,314 to provide Sure Start services within their catchment area to children aged under 4 and their parents in 2016/17.

Schools within the Greater Shankill area receive funding of just under £320,000 as part of the Extended Schools Programme.

Belfast Boys' Model and Belfast Model School for Girls receive funding of £385,000 for the Full Service Schools Programme. The service offers substantial additional programmes and activities not only for pupils but also the local community.

Four schools within the Greater Shankill area receive funding of £70,000 each for nurture group provision, an in-school, teacher-led psychosocial intervention involving small groups of around 6 to 10 children.

Funding of £116,160 has been provided to West Kirk Youth and Community Project; £45,000 has been provided to Mount Coylier Youth Centre and £78,000 provided to Woodvale Youth Club for refurbishment of premises.

The Education Authority's Youth Office is also currently engaged in youth work in the greater Shankill area across statutory and voluntary provision to deliver a wide range of personal and social development programmes.

The Greater Shankill Partnership Board has been allocated £59,130 as part of the West Belfast Community Project.

In 2014, the Greater Shankill was declared a Children and Young People's Zone. This is not something that funding has been provided for but I have pledged my support to the Partnership Board.

I have undertaken to co-ordinate a cross departmental group of senior officials to support the aims of the Zone and to work cohesively together across Departments to ensure funds and programmes deliver maximum impact for the area.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) urban; and (ii) rural organisations that are supported by his Department through the Pathways Fund.

(AQW 2889/16-21)

Mr Weir: The following tables provide details of the organisations supported by the Department through the Pathway Fund in 2016/17 broken down by urban and rural locations.

Pathway funded organisations – Urban locations

Organisation	Town
An Droichead	Ardstraw
Ashton Community Trust	Belfast
Ballee Community Childcare	Ballymena
Ballybeen Women's Centre LTD	Belfast
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast
Blackie River Community Groups	Belfast
Bloomfield Community Association	Belfast
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna	Belfast
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	Omagh
Dara Pre-School	Armagh
Derry Well Women	Londonderry
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	Belfast
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast
First Housing Aid & Support Services	Londonderry
First Steps Playgroup and Parent and Toddler Group	Belfast
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	Waterside
Giggles and Wiggles	Strabane
Glen Community Parent Youth Group	Belfast

Organisation	Town
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	Coleraine
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast
Home-Start North Down	Bangor
Ionad na Fuisgeoige	Belfast
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast
Jack and Jill Pre-School	Cookstown
Kids Together Belfast	Belfast
Kilcooley Women's Centre	Bangor
Larne Community Care Centre	Larne
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	Limavady
Little Orchids Ltd	Londonderry
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	Belfast
Monbrief Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon
Nai-ionad Ard Eoin	Belfast
Naíonra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick
Newhill First Steps Daycare Centre Ltd	Belfast
Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre	Newry
Oasis Caring in Action	Belfast
Parish of Nativity Playgroup	Belfast
Play-A-Way Childcare Centre	Newtownards
Quaker Service	Belfast
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Londonderry
Richmount Playgroup	Portadown
Roden Street Community Development Group	Belfast
Royal Mencap Society – MENCAP	Newtownbreda
Sólás	Belfast
St Colum's Pre-School Centre	Portstewart
Star Neighbourhood Centre	Belfast
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Belfast
West Bann Development	Coleraine
Whiterock Creche Association Ltd	Belfast
Women's Windsor Centre	Belfast
Women's Centre Derry	Londonderry

Pathway funded organisations – Rural locations

Organisation	Town
Acorn Women's Group	Augher
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	Omagh
Bo Peeps Playgroup	Enniskillen
Care Bears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Clogher Valley Playgroup	Clogher
Denamona Pre-School Education Centre	Fintona
Dunnaman Children's Centre	Kilkeel
Eskra Childcare Ltd	Omagh
First Steps Community Playgroup	Castledearg
First Steps Daycare Ltd	Castledearg
Giggles Early Years Ltd	Newry
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	Fivemiletown
Kidzone	Newry
Little Amps Early Years	Maghera
McClintock's Children's Centre	Omagh
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	Newtownbutler
Nippers Alley Playgroup	Omagh
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Pomeroy
The Dry Arch Children's Centre	Dungiven

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline the definition of Shared Education.
(AQW 2892/16-21)

Mr Weir: Shared Education is defined within the Shared Education Act (NI) 2016 as:

Shared education means the education together of—

- (a) those of different religious belief, including reasonable numbers of both Protestant and Roman Catholic children or young persons; and
- (b) those who are experiencing socio-economic deprivation and those who are not,

which is secured by the working together and co-operation of two or more relevant providers.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline the shared education programmes that children took part in between 2011-15.
(AQW 2894/16-21)

Mr Weir: There were a number of International Fund for Ireland pilot shared education projects, that were implemented up to the closure of their Sharing In Education Programme in December 2013. Details of the pilot programmes are available on the IFI website (www.internationalfundforireland.com).

The Delivering Social Change Shared Education Signature Project, which is being implemented through the Education Authority, opened for applications in December 2014 with delivery commencing during the last two terms of 2014/15 academic year.

Action plans are unique to each school, based on self evaluation against the ETI Framework for School Collaboration and designed to further embed shared education.

Mr Carroll asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline the reason why only teachers who work in a FE college have their PGCE(FE) qualification recognised by the teaching council as opposed to those involved in adult education in work-based situations; and (ii) whether he has any plans to review this reasoning.

(AQW 2913/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (Further Education) (PGCE(FE)) is primarily an inservice training course for lecturers employed in the further education sector. Anyone who has completed the PGCE(FE) is recognised by

the Department of the Economy (DfE) as eligible to teach in the further education sector and registration with the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI) or otherwise has no impact on this eligibility.

The GTCNI is responsible for approving the qualifications required in order to register to teach in grant-aided schools here. The GTCNI has determined that individuals who have obtained a PGCE(FE) qualification while teaching in a further education college as recognised by the DfE for at least eight hours per week, may be eligible to be registered as a teacher in a grant-aided school here. The Department has however no power to intervene in this process.

I have been advised that the GTCNI plan, in the near future, to carry out a comprehensive review of its approach to the approval of qualifications to teach in grant-aided schools in Northern Ireland.

Mr Milne asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many voluntary schools have applied to transfer to controlled status since 2007; (ii) the timeframe from application to completion for each; (iii) how many applications were unsuccessful; (iv) how many applications are currently in process; and (v) how many applications have necessitated the need for legal advice.
(AQW 2914/16-21)

Mr Weir:

- (i) Three, including two currently in process.
- (ii) The time frame varies as each application is considered on its merits, taking into account the circumstances of the individual school.
- (iii) None.
- (iv) Two.
- (v) All applications for transfer to controlled status require legal advice.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education whether his Department plans to allow pupils at post-GCSE level of study to opt out from collective worship in school assemblies.
(AQW 2928/16-21)

Mr Weir: Parental consent is required in order for pupils to opt out of collective worship in school assemblies. I have no plans to change this.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) how his Department will determine the wishes of parents to allow their children to be coached for unregulated Transfer Tests during school hours; and (ii) how this complies with the statutory rights of all children to access teaching and learning at a level appropriate to their needs and abilities.
(AQW 2929/16-21)

Mr Weir: Responsibility as to how learning and teaching is delivered in the classroom is for teachers to make, based on their professional judgement. My expectation is that all pupils will be supported to reach their full potential.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Education to outline when he intends to announce a new school to replace St Paul's College, Kilrea and St Mary's College, Claudy following the decision that they should amalgamate.
(AQW 2944/16-21)

Mr Weir: The amalgamation of two or more schools does not automatically ensure that the new school will be selected to advance in planning for major capital investment.

A project must first be prioritised by the school's Managing Authority in response to any call for projects to be considered for major capital investment. There are no plans for a further capital announcement at present given the substantial size of the current Major Capital Investment Programme. However, should a future call be made, I understand that the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) would be likely to prioritise this project.

Following a call, the Department's 'Protocol for the Selection of Major Works Projects to Proceed in Planning' is applied to all projects submitted. The Protocol includes a 'gateway' check to exclude any projects where uncertainties exist around sustainability, area planning and school size.

Those projects that progress to be scored under the Protocol will latterly be ranked and selection will be subject to the capital budget availability at the time.

The current scoring criteria provides for additional weight to be allocated to proposals involving schools which have recently been subject to a rationalisation process, particularly those operating on a split site.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to outline what consideration his Department has given to developing an SEN category for Acquired Brain Injury.
(AQW 2949/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department is currently reviewing the process of how schools record pupils with SEN; with consideration being given to the SEN categories, including those pupils with an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Education to outline the tests and assessments in place in schools to test for Acquired Brain Injury.

(AQW 2950/16-21)

Mr Weir: The statutory responsibility for securing provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs (SEN) rests with schools and the Education Authority (EA) who are responsible for identifying, assessing and, in appropriate cases, making provision for children with SEN.

The Education Authority has confirmed that the Education Psychology Service is not aware of any neuropsychological tests that a SENCO could be trained to use in school to identify ABI. A diagnosis in this complex area would require an assessment undertaken by those professionals with a medical qualification.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline (i) when the key stakeholders forum for childcare will be meeting again; and (ii) how will they be involved in the next stage of development of the childcare strategy.

(AQW 2964/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Childcare Strategy has been developed on a co-design basis. This has included one-to-one meetings between officials and the main childcare stakeholders and the establishment of a Stakeholder Advisory Forum which has met four times.

The draft Childcare Strategy that issued for consultation in 2015 included proposals for a Stakeholder Panel that would have a formal, scrutiny role in respect of the delivery of the Strategy. I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the agreed Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

Mr Middleton asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on the refurbishment of Newbuildings Primary School in the Foyle constituency; and (ii) to outline the projected completion date.

(AQW 2990/16-21)

Mr Weir: The School Enhancement Project for Newbuildings Primary School is being taken forward by the Education Authority (EA). It involves the refurbishment of the ageing school buildings and services to provide an environment that meets the current standards of the Building Handbook. The scheme has a Financial Director approved cost of £1.932m.

The refurbishment of Newbuildings has progressed well. Phases 1, 2, 3, which address refurbishment of classrooms, the ITT suite and Library, are complete and occupied by the school. The remaining two Phases 4 & 5 which are focused on the multi-purpose hall and staff accommodation are due to be occupied by the school by 7 October 2016. The remaining elements of the project are due for completion by the 29 October 2016.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to detail the total costs of construction of the Strule Shared Education Campus.

(AQW 3026/16-21)

Mr Weir: At August 2016 prices the latest estimated total construction cost of the Strule Shared Education Campus, including expenditure incurred before 2016/17 is £159m. This includes the construction of the six core schools (including Arvalee School and Resource Centre which opened on 6th September 2016), shared facilities, site works, road works and professional fees. Optimism Bias is included. This estimate excludes other non construction programme costs.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline how Strule Shared Education Campus will facilitate contact between pupils from different schools and backgrounds.

(AQW 3027/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department's Shared Education Policy delivers opportunities for children and young people from different community, social and economic backgrounds to learn together in an inclusive environment. It aims to deliver educational benefits to learners and promotes inclusion in terms of equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion.

The Strule Shared Education Campus (SSEC) is an innovative programme involving the provision of six core schools, alongside purpose built shared education and shared sports facilities. The Campus is being designed to encourage cohesion, collaboration and partnership and will offer opportunities for students of all ages and abilities from mixed religious backgrounds and different cultures. The configuration will allow each of the schools to retain their individuality and ethos, whilst availing of the opportunities provided through collaboration and sharing.

The shared sports facilities, which will be available to all pupils on the campus, will include a sports centre and synthetic and grass pitches.

Pupils will also have opportunities to learn together within the Shared Education Centre. This building will provide collaborative education opportunities and experiences across the STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and

Mathematics) area of the curriculum which will enable a more flexible cross curricular and cross school approach to learning with enhanced curriculum choices, particularly at post-16 stage.

The close proximity of the schools on the campus will also facilitate further opportunities for sharing within core school buildings.

Pupils attending schools not situated on the SSEC will also be able to avail of campus facilities, through the Omagh Learning Community's partnership arrangements.

Working jointly with the Education Authority, a campus education strategy which supports this culture of sharing will be designed and developed in close consultation with the schools.

It should be noted that we believe shared education is vital to building a successful education system. Nevertheless, this should not be to the detriment of a school's individual value and ethos.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Education (i) to outline how the revised school curriculum imparts healthy living values to children and young people, including approaches to diet, exercise and mindfulness; and (ii) whether there is a specific health promoting scheme in which schools are invited to express an interest.

(AQW 3034/16-21)

Mr Weir: Physical Education (PE) is a compulsory part of the curriculum for all pupils at every Key Stage from the ages of 4 to 16. My Department has recommended that schools provide pupils with at least 2 hours of PE a week.

My Department recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development and that good nutrition makes a positive contribution to children's learning, concentration and educational performance. Through the "Healthy Food for Healthy Outcomes – Food in Schools Policy", the Department has proactively sought to improve the quality of food in our schools to complement the healthy eating messages delivered through the curriculum.

My Department currently provides funding for the Curriculum Sports Programme (£1.3m in 2016-17) which is delivered by the IFA and GAA. The Programme aims to enhance the physical literacy skills of pupils at Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1. I am aware of other programmes/schemes that promote healthy living to our young people; however, it is entirely a matter for individual schools to determine which resources or programmes they wish to use to support their delivery of the curriculum.

As regards emotional health and well-being, the Department's 'I-Matter' programme is about addressing how the entire school community should be engaged in promoting resilient emotional health and well-being for all pupils.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of statemented children at the start of the current academic year in primary schools in North Down.

(AQW 3039/16-21)

Mr Weir: Finalised information for pupils with statements of special educational needs for the current academic year will not be available until March 2017.

The number of pupils in primary schools situated in North Down that have a statement of special educational needs in 2015/16 was 194 (2.5% of all primary school pupils in North Down). This figure include nursery and reception pupils.

(Source: NI school census)

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail those organisations funded either by (i) the Early Years Fund; and (ii) the Pathways Fund, in the last three years.

(AQW 3054/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Early Years Fund closed at the end of the 2015/16 financial year and was replaced by the new Pathway Fund.

The attached tables provide details of the organisations that received funding from the Early Years Fund in 2014/15 (table 1) and 2015/16 (table 2), and from the Pathway Fund in 2016/17 (table 3).

Table 1 - Early Years Fund Organisations 2014/15

2014/15 - Name of Organisation	Town
174 Trust Pre-School	Belfast
Acorn Women's Group	Augher
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	Coleraine
An Droichead	Belfast
Appletree Childcare	Coleraine
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Armoy Cross Community Playgroup	Ballymoney

2014/15 - Name of Organisation	Town
Ashgrove Pre-School Playgroup	Portadown
Ashton Childcare	Belfast
Atlas Creche	Lisburn
Atticall Playgroup	Kilkeel
Ballinascreen Early Years Pre-School Education Centre	Draperstown
Balloughry Integrated Community Playgroup	Londonderry
Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre School Ltd	Downpatrick
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast
Banagher Community Playgroup	Londonderry
Barnardos BME	Belfast
Barnardos Forward Steps	Belfast
Barnardos Travellers Pre-School	Belfast
BCDA	Belfast
Beacon Playgroup	Cookstown
Bees Nees Early Years Centre	Newtownards
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast
Benburb Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Blackie Creche	Belfast
Bloomfield Playgroup	Belfast
Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup	Derrygonnelly
Buttonmoon Playgroup	Tandragee
Carebears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Carryduff Pre School Playgroup	Belfast
Castlerock Community Playgroup	Castlerock
Caw Community Playgroup	Londonderry
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	Greyabbey
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon
Clady Tiny Tots	Clady
Clough & District Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Cloughmills Early Years	Cloughmills
Crows Nest Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Dara Playgroup	Armagh
Derry Well Woman Creche	Londonderry
Derrytrasna Playgroup	Craigavon
Dervock Playgroup	Ballymoney
Drumellan Community Association	Craigavon
Drumturn Parent and Toddler	Limavady
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	Dundrum
Dunloy Community Playgroup	Ballymoney
Dunnaman Children's Centre	Kilkeel
Earlybird Playgroup	Armagh

2014/15 - Name of Organisation	Town
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast
First Steps Community Playgroup	Castledearg
First Steps Day Care Project	Castledearg
First Steps Playgroup	Belfast
Foyle Downs Syndrome Trust	Londonderry
Gingerbread Lone Parent Services	Londonderry
Glenarm Community Pre School	Glenarm
Greengables Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn
Hansel and Gretel Pre School	Glynn
Happy Days Playgroup	Newry
Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup	Larne
Harpers Hill Community Early Years	Coleraine
Hillside Pre School Playgroup	Newtownabbey
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast
Holy Cross Pre School	Belfast
Holy Trinity Centre	Belfast
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson
Kids Korner	Larne
Kids R Us Cross Community	Fivemiletown
Kid zone Playgroup (Newry)	Newry
Kilkeel Community Association	Kilkeel
Killeen Playgroup	Newry
Killen Parent and Toddler	Castledearg
Killyleagh Early Years P & T	Killyleagh
Killyman Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Kingdom Playgroup	Kilkeel
Krafty Kids (Ogras)	Coalisland
Ladybird Playgroup	Omagh
Laurencetown Playgroup	Laurencetown
Leitrim Community Playgroup	Castlewellan
Lifestart Limavady	Limavady
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast
Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose	Derrynoose
Little Amps Playgroup	Maghera
Little Castles Playgroup	Lisnaskea
Little Diamonds Community Playgroup	Claudy
Little Doves Childcare Centre	Newtownards
Little Folk Playgroup	Rostrevor
Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon

2014/15 - Name of Organisation	Town
Little People Playgroup	Newry
Little Rainbows PG	Maghera
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	Limavady
Little Villagers Playgroup	Loughilly
Loughgiel Community PG	Loughgiel
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast
Macosquin Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Magherafelt Women's Group (Kidz Lodge)	Magherafelt
Magic Roundabout Playgroup	Omagh
Magilligan Community Playgroup	Limavady
Monkstown Community School Playgroup	Monkstown
Mother Goose Community Playgroup	Ballycastle
Naiscoil an Chreagain	Newry
Naiscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
Naiscoil Ard Eoin	Belfast
Naiscoil Charn Tochair	Maghera
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick
Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha	Maghera
Newhill First Steps Childcare Centre	Belfast
NICMA	Newtownards
O'Fiaich Playgroup	Armagh
Old Warren Community Association	Lisburn
Omagh Early Years Centre	Omagh
Orana Nursery	Newry
Orchard Community Playgroup	Limavady
Parish of Nativity Playgroup, Poleglass	Belfast
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Dungannon
Portaferry Playgroup	Newtownards
Portrush Community Pre-School Playgroup	Portrush
Poyntzpass Community Playgroup	Poyntzpass
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Londonderry
Rainbow Community Playgroup	Omagh
Rainbow Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Rasharkin Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Roden Street Development Group	Belfast
Scoil na Fuisioige	Dunmurray
Shalom House Creche	Belfast
Shankill Women's Centre	Belfast
Slievegallion Community Playgroup	Magherafelt
Smart Attack Childcare Services	Omagh
St Teresa's Youth Centre	Belfast

2014/15 - Name of Organisation	Town
Stepping Stones Playgroup	Maghera
Stepping Stones Pre School Nursery	Newtownabbey
Stewartstown Tiny Tots	Stewartstown
Straidarran Community Playgroup	Claudy
Strangford Parent and Toddler	Strangford
Sugar and Spice Playgroup	Drumquin
Sunflower Early Years Group	Fintona
Taghnevan Pre School Playgroup	Lurgan
Taylorstown Cross Community Complex	Toomebridge
The Cedar Foundation	Londonderry
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh
The Orchard Playgroup	Loughgall
Tiny Steps Creche	Cookstown
Tiny Toons Playgroup	Ballyhoran
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup	Strathfoyle
Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup	Killylea
Tober Tinys Playgroup	Tobermore
Upper Andersonstown Comm. Forums Daycare Facility	Belfast
West Bann Development	Coleraine
Whiterock Creche Centre	Belfast
Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast
Zero-8-Teen	Brownlow

Table 2 - Early Years Fund Organisations 2015/16

2015/16 - Name Of Organisation	Town
174 Trust Pre-School	Belfast
Acorn Women's Group	Augher
Aghadowey Pre-School Playgroup	Coleraine
An Droichead	Belfast
Appletree Childcare	Coleraine
Ardstraw Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Armoy Cross Community Playgroup	Ballymoney
Ashgrove Pre-School Playgroup	Portadown
Ashton Childcare	Belfast
Atlas Creche	Lisburn
Atticall Playgroup	Kilkeel
Ballinascreen Early Years Pre-School Education Centre	Draperstown
Balloughry Integrated Community Playgroup	Londonderry
Ballykinlar Cross Community Pre School Ltd	Downpatrick
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast
Banagher Community Playgroup	Londonderry

2015/16 - Name Of Organisation	Town
Barnardos BME	Belfast
Barnardos Forward Steps	Belfast
Barnardos Travellers Pre-School	Belfast
BCDA	Belfast
Beacon Playgroup	Cookstown
Bees Nees Early Years Centre	Newtownards
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast
Benburb Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Blackie Creche	Belfast
Bloomfield Playgroup	Belfast
Bunnahone Bunnies Playgroup	Derrygonnelly
Buttonmoon Playgroup	Tandragee
Carebears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Carryduff Pre School Playgroup	Belfast
Castlerock Community Playgroup	Castlerock
Caw Community Playgroup	Londonderry
Chirpy Chicks Playgroup	Greyabbey
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon
Clady Tiny Tots	Clady
Clough & District Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Cloughmills Early Years	Cloughmills
Crows Nest Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Dara Playgroup	Armagh
Derry Well Woman Creche	Londonderry
Derrytrasna Playgroup	Craigavon
Dervock Playgroup	Ballymoney
Drumellan Community Association	Craigavon
Drumsurn Parent and Toddler	Limavady
Dundrum Cross Community Playgroup	Dundrum
Dunloy Community Playgroup	Ballymoney
Dunnaman Children's Centre	Kilkeel
Earlybird Playgroup	Armagh
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast
First Steps Community Playgroup	Castledearg
First Steps Day Care Project	Castledearg
First Steps Playgroup	Belfast
Foyle Downs Syndrome Trust	Londonderry
Glenarm Community Pre School	Glenarm
Greengables Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn
Hansel and Gretel Pre School	Glynn

2015/16 - Name Of Organisation	Town
Happy Days Playgroup	Newry
Harbour Bears Pre-School Playgroup	Larne
Harpers Hill Community Early Years	Coleraine
Hillside Pre School Playgroup	Newtownabbey
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast
Holy Cross Pre School	Belfast
Holy Trinity Centre	Belfast
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson
Kids Korner	Larne
Kids R Us Cross Community	Fivemiletown
Kid zone Playgroup (Newry)	Newry
Kilkeel Community Association	Kilkeel
Killean Playgroup	Newry
Killen Parent and Toddler	Castledearg
Killyleagh Early Years P & T	Killyleagh
Killyman Community Playgroup	Dungannon
Kingdom Playgroup	Kilkeel
Krafty Kids (Ogras)	Coalisland
Ladybird Playgroup	Omagh
Laurencetown Playgroup	Laurencetown
Leitrim Community Playgroup	Castlewellan
Lifestart Limavady	Limavady
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast
Little Acorns Playgroup Derrynoose	Derrynoose
Little Amps Playgroup	Maghera
Little Castles Playgroup	Lisnaskea
Little Diamonds Community Playgroup	Claudy
Little Doves Childcare Centre	Newtownards
Little Folk Playgroup	Rostrevor
Little Oaks Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon
Little People Playgroup	Newry
Little Rainbows PG	Maghera
Little Rascals Community Playgroup	Limavady
Little Villagers Playgroup	Loughilly
Loughgiel Community PG	Loughgiel
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast
Macosquin Community Playgroup	Coleraine
Magherafelt Women's Group (Kidz Lodge)	Magherafelt
Magic Roundabout Playgroup	Omagh
Magilligan Community Playgroup	Limavady

2015/16 - Name Of Organisation	Town
Monkstown Community School Playgroup	Monkstown
Mother Goose Community Playgroup	Ballycastle
Naiscoil an Chreagain	Newry
Naiscoil an tSleibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
Naiscoil Ard Eoin	Belfast
Naiscoil Charn Tochair	Maghera
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick
Naiscoil Mhachaire Ratha	Maghera
Newhill First Steps Childcare Centre	Belfast
NICMA	Newtownards
O'Fiaich Playgroup	Armagh
Omagh Early Years Centre	Omagh
Orana Nursery	Newry
Orchard Community Playgroup	Limavady
Parish of Nativity Playgroup, Poleglass	Belfast
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Dungannon
Portaferry Playgroup	Newtownards
Portrush Community Pre-School Playgroup	Portrush
Poyntzpass Community Playgroup	Poyntzpass
Rainbow Child and Family Centre	Londonderry
Rainbow Community Playgroup	Omagh
Rainbow Playgroup	Carrickfergus
Rasharkin Community Playgroup	Ballymena
Roden Street Development Group	Belfast
Scoil na Fuisseoige	Dunmurray
Shalom House Creche	Belfast
Shankill Women's Centre	Belfast
Slievegallion Community Playgroup	Magherafelt
Smart Attack Childcare Services	Omagh
St Teresa's Youth Centre	Belfast
Stepping Stones Playgroup	Maghera
Stepping Stones Pre School Nursery	Newtownabbey
Stewartstown Tiny Tots	Stewartstown
Straidarran Community Playgroup	Claudy
Strangford Parent and Toddler	Strangford
Sugar and Spice Playgroup	Drumquin
Sunflower Early Years Group	Fintona
Taghnevan Pre School Playgroup	Lurgan
Taylorstown Cross Community Complex	Toomebridge
The Cedar Foundation	Londonderry
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh

2015/16 - Name Of Organisation	Town
The Orchard Playgroup	Loughgall
Tiny Steps Creche	Cookstown
Tiny Toons Playgroup	Ballyhoran
Tiny Tots Community Playgroup	Strathfoyle
Tiny Tots Corner Playgroup	Killylea
Tober Tinys Playgroup	Tobermore
Upper Andersonstown Comm. Forums Daycare Facility	Belfast
West Bann Development	Coleraine
Whiterock Creche Centre	Belfast
Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast
Zero-8-Teen	Brownlow

Table 3¹ - Pathway Fund Organisations 2016/17

2016/17 - Name of Organisation	Town
Acorn Women's Group	Augher
An Droichead	Belfast
Ardstraw community playgroup	Omagh
Ashton Community Trust	Belfast
Ballee Community Childcare	Ballymena
Ballybeen Women's Centre LTD	Belfast
Ballymacarrett Youth and Community Project	Belfast
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	Belfast
Blackie River Community Groups	Belfast
Bloomfield Community Association	Belfast
Bo Peeps Playgroup	Enniskillen
Cairde Gaelscoil na Móna	Belfast
Care Bears Community Playgroup	Newtownstewart
Chrysalis Women's Centre	Craigavon
Clogher Valley Playgroup	Clogher
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	Omagh
Dara Pre-School	Armagh
Denamona Pre-School Education Centre	Fintona
Derry Well Women	Londonderry
Dunnaman Children's Centre	Kilkeel
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	Belfast
Eskra Childcare Ltd	Omagh
Falls Women's Centre	Belfast
First Housing Aid & Support Services	Londonderry
First Steps Community Playgroup	Castledearg
First Steps Daycare Ltd	Castledearg

1 Table 3 does not include those organisations that received transitional funding for the period 1 April 2016 to 30 June 2016.

2016/17 - Name of Organisation	Town
First Steps Playgroup and Parent & Toddler Group	Belfast
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	Waterside
Giggles and Wiggles	Strabane
Giggles Early Years Ltd	Newry
Glen Community Parent Youth Group	Belfast
Grove Community Playgroup	Lisburn
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	Coleraine
Hobby Horse Playgroup	Belfast
Home-Start North Down	Bangor
Ionad na Fuisseoige	Belfast
Ionad Uibh Eachach	Belfast
Jack and Jill Pre-School	Cookstown
Kiddies Castle Early Years	Castledawson
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	Fivemiletown
Kids Together Belfast	Belfast
Kidzone	Newry
Kilcooley Women's Centre	Bangor
Larne Community Care Centre	Larne
Ligoniel Family Centre	Belfast
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	Limavady
Little Amps Early Years	Maghera
Little Orchids Ltd	Londonderry
Lower Oldpark Community Association	Belfast
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	Belfast
McClintocks Childrens Centre	Omagh
Monbrief Pre-School Playgroup	Craigavon
Nai-ionad Ard Eoin	Belfast
Naionra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	Belfast
Naiscoil Dhun Padraig	Downpatrick
Newhill First Steps Daycare Centre Ltd	Belfast
Newry Early Years children and Family Centre	Newry
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	Newtownbutler
Nippers Alley Playgroup	Omagh
Oasis Caring in Action	Belfast
Parish of Nativity Playgroup	Belfast
Play-A-Way Childcare Centre	Newtownards
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	Pomeroy
Quaker Service	Belfast
Rainbow Child And Family Centre	Londonderry
Richmount Playgroup	Portadown
Roden Street Community Development Group	Belfast

2016/17 - Name of Organisation	Town
Royal Mencap Society - MENCAP	Newtownbreda
Sólás	Belfast
St Colums PreSchool Centre	Portstewart
Star Neighbourhood Centre	Belfast
The Dry Arch Childrens Centre	Dungiven
The Firs Playgroup	Armagh
Upper Andersonstown Community Forum	Belfast
West Bann Development	Coleraine
Whiterock Creche Association Ltd	Belfast
Women's Centre Derry	Londonderry
Women Too Windsor Women's Centre	Belfast

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider multiyear funding as opposed to the current annual funding system in any proposed alteration to the Pathways Fund.

(AQW 3055/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Pathway Fund was introduced from 1 April 2016, replacing the former Early Years Fund. As you are aware in its first year of operation, applications for funding were for one year only. The Department, with input from Early Years - the Organisation for Young Children, will review the outcome of the first year of the Pathway Fund in order to inform future funding rounds, including the appropriateness of annual funding.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) the groups in receipt of the Pathways Fund that applied for more than £30,000; and (ii) the amount applied for in each case.

(AQW 3056/16-21)

Mr Weir: The attached table lists the groups in receipt of funding from the Pathway Fund that applied for more than £30,000; and the amount applied for in each case. Of the 36 groups applying for more than £30,000, 12 were allocated an amount less than that applied for.

Pathway Fund (2016/17) – Groups Applying for More than £30,000 and the Amount Applied for

Name of Organisation	Amount Applied for
An Droichead	£38,719
Ashton Community Trust	£37,365
Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid	£48,771
Blackie River Community Groups	£59,329
Chrysalis Women's Centre	£38,683
Cornabracken Child Care Ltd	£62,380
East Belfast Mission-Bright Sparks Daycare	£103,368
Falls Women's Centre	£57,584
First Housing Aid & Support Services	£57,425
First Steps Daycare Ltd	£91,840
First Steps Playgroup and Parent & Toddler Group	£34,390
Foyle Down Syndrome Trust	£98,222
Giggles and Wiggles	£39,288
Giggles Early Years Ltd	£51,404
Grove Community Playgroup	£53,758
Harpurs Hill Children and Family Centre Ltd	£47,635

Name of Organisation	Amount Applied for
Hobby Horse Playgroup	£36,914
Ionad Uibh Eachach	£80,619
Kids R Us Cross Community Playgroup	£36,381
Kidzone	£43,193
Kilcooley Women's Centre	£60,334
Limavady Community Development Initiative Ltd	£51,847
Lower Oldpark Community Association	£37,431
Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group	£41,013
Naíonra an tSléibhe Dhuibh	£45,634
Newhill First Steps Daycare Centre Ltd	£36,431
Newry Early Years Children and Family Centre	£54,931
Newtownbutler Playgroup Ltd	£55,622
Oasis Caring in Action	£31,176
Pomeroy Pre School Playgroup	£45,939
Quaker Service	£40,000
Royal Mencap Society - MENCAP	£34,403
The Firs Playgroup	£42,661
West Bann Development	£51,812
Whiterock Creche Association Ltd	£36,922
Windsor Women's Centre	£43,548

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education to detail the names of the independent panel members that moderated Early Years funding applications; and their relevant knowledge and experience.

(AQW 3057/16-21)

Mr Weir: The panel that moderated the applications for the Early Years Pathway Fund comprised the following members:

Billy Gamble (Chairperson) – an Equality Commissioner and board member of the International Fund for Ireland. Previously Director of Equality in the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister with responsibility for developing the 10 year strategy for children and young people.

Dr Marleen Collins – previously employed with the Education and Training Inspectorate, now undertakes consultancy work in the field of early childhood care and education. She has specialist knowledge in the field of work with children with additional needs.

Deirdre McAliskey – National Children's Bureau. She has overall responsibility for a varied portfolio of evidence based programmes for children, young people and families. Previously worked with BELONG NI (the interagency family support programme promoting a sense of belonging amongst Black Minority Ethnic children and young people in Northern Ireland), NI Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International.

Teresa Canavan – Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) – expert in rural development policy, planning and implementation at national and EU level.

Evelyn Curran – Health and Social Care Board. Manager of the South Eastern Childcare Partnership with responsibility for strategic development of Sure Start projects, allocation of funding, including capital funding to the Early Years sector; support to the Early Years sector with training, quality, information and promoting of childcare and early years provision to parents.

Siobhán Fitzpatrick – Chief Executive, Early Years – the Organisation for Young Children. Siobhán has responsibility for policy and strategic development, relationships with the Childcare Partnerships, and Pre-school Education Advisory Groups. She also manages Cross Border relationships and International partnerships.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail how much it would cost to provide all school children with Translink passes so they can avail of Translink buses before 6pm on weekdays free of charge.

(AQW 3059/16-21)

Mr Weir: The cost of providing Translink sessional tickets to all primary and post-primary school pupils would be approximately £219m.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Education whether (i) his Department has a policy to promote the renewable energy industry in schools; and (ii) independent developers and operators of renewable energy are permitted to visit and distribute literature in local schools promoting wind, bioenergy and solar power.

(AQW 3063/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Department of Education (DE) has no specific policy in relation to the renewable energy industry in schools.

Education for Sustainable Development is a key element within the curriculum. This presents opportunities for teachers and pupils to explore issues in relation to renewable energy, including how this might be used in a school setting. However DE does not endorse or recommend any particular resource or programme for use by schools. It is entirely a matter for individual schools to determine which literature, resources or programmes they wish to use to support their delivery of the curriculum.

The installation of renewable energy technologies in schools is considered on a case-by-case basis and in line with available capital budget. The Education Authority will provide schools with support and appropriate professional advice if they are interested in pursuing a renewable energy option within their school.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) for an update on Preparing to Learn which is part of the Early Intervention Transformation Programme; and to detail (ii) actions undertaken to date; (iii) the outcomes that have been achieved; (iv) was there an evaluation; (v) what budget was allocated; and (vi) how much has been spent to date and on what.

(AQW 3071/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Early Intervention Transformation Programme (EITP) is a Northern Ireland Executive / Atlantic Philanthropies Delivering Social Change Signature Programme. The Department of Health (DoH) leads on EITP Workstream 1 and the Department of Education (DE) leads on 'Getting Ready to Learn' (GRtL) as part of Workstream 1.

GRtL is focused on improving outcomes for children in pre-school by engaging and empowering parents to help them create and sustain positive home learning environments. It seeks to transform pre-school practice by using the skills of early years teachers and practitioners to support all parents to develop the confidence and skills they need to do this.

GRtL is an application based programme available to all pre-school education settings with DE funded places. The Education Authority (EA) is responsible for managing and administering the programme and a Programme Manager has been appointed to implement the programme over the next three years. DE in conjunction with the EA held information sessions during January and February for pre-school settings to raise awareness of the programme and encourage participation.

The first call for applications launched on 18 March 2016 and there was a second call on 29 June which closes on 30 September. Settings can choose to apply for up to four themes, with a focus on the importance of parent child relationships, attachment, childhood education and learning, and healthy lifestyles. Further information on the themes can be found on the EA website (<http://www.eani.org.uk/schools/getting-ready-to-learn/>). The programme will run for three academic years (2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19) with an investment of approximately £3m over the three years. The EA will issue the first funding allocations to settings (in line with their approved applications) by the end of September.

As the programme is in the early stages of implementation, it is too early for an evaluation. As with other EITP programmes, GRtL will use an outcomes based approach to monitoring and evaluation.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education to outline when an analysis of responses to the Childcare Strategy will be made available.

(AQW 3075/16-21)

Mr Weir: Public consultation on a draft version of the Childcare Strategy took place from July to November 2015. An analysis of all responses received will be published on the Departmental website following the launch of the final Childcare Strategy.

I hope to bring forward the full version of the Childcare Strategy to my Executive colleagues in the coming months, having taken account of the many consultation responses received, the agreed Programme for Government and the new opportunities that now exist to align childcare and Early Years initiatives.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail what percentage of pupils attending a selective grammar school remained at the school post GCSE, broken down by year since 2009.

(AQW 3080/16-21)

Mr Weir: The following table shows the percentage of pupils attending grammar schools that were doing a level 2 qualification (GCSE or equivalent) in the previous year and remained in the school system to study a level 3 qualification (A Level or equivalent) in the year stated.

2015/16	88.5
2014/15	88.5

2013/14	89.1
2012/13	89.3
2011/12	89.2
2010/11	88.8
2009/10	87.4

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- 1 The data provided is based on grammar schools only. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level. The Department does not hold data as to which pupils sat transfer tests or which pupils were academically selected (as this only occurs if the number of applications exceeds approved enrolments).
- 2 Pupils counted to calculate staying on rates for pupils in year 13 in 2015/16 are those that were in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15 and were in the first year of a level 3 qualification in 2015/16. This is divided by the number of pupils in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15. Pupils that repeat GCSEs are not counted as 'staying on'.
- 3 Pupils that move schools between these years are counted as 'staying on'.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education to detail what percentage of pupils remained at school post GCSE in 2015-16. (AQW 3081/16-21)

Mr Weir: The percentage of pupils that were doing a level 2 qualification (GCSE or equivalent) in 2014/15 and remained in the school system to study a level 3 qualification (A Level or equivalent) in 2015/16 is 63.7%.

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- 4 Pupils counted to calculate staying on rates for pupils in year 13 in 2015/16 are those that were in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15 and were in the first year of a level 3 qualification in 2015/16. This is divided by the number of pupils in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15. Pupils that repeat GCSEs are not counted as 'staying on'.
- 5 Pupils that move schools between these years are counted as 'staying on'.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister of Education to outline the current projected cost of the Strule Shared Education Campus. (AQW 3085/16-21)

Mr Weir: At August 2016 prices the latest estimated total construction cost of the Strule Shared Education Campus, including expenditure incurred before 2016/17 is £159m. This includes the construction of the six core schools (including Arvalee School and Resource Centre which opened on 6th September 2016), shared facilities, site works, road works and professional fees. Optimism Bias is included. This estimate excludes other non construction programme costs.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Education, regarding the award of a school bus contract to a operator from Co. Donegal as opposed to Mr William Leonard of Bready, County Derry, (i) to outline what steps he taken to ensure the future award of school bus contracts do not disadvantage operators from Northern Ireland; (ii) whether he has any plans to compensate Mr. Leonard for loss of income; and (iii) whether he will now issue an apology to Mr Leonard. (AQW 3096/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Education Authority (EA) has confirmed that all EA Home to School Transport contracts are offered in compliance with current procurement regulations. These contracts are open to all private operators who meet the requirements of the tender.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education to outline how he will action the Fresh Start Panel Report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups in Northern Ireland recommendation that ambitious targets and milestones be set to achieve measurable progress as quickly as possible to reduce segregation in education. (AQW 3108/16-21)

Mr Weir: The Panel's report acknowledges that there are numerous factors that lead some young people to consider joining paramilitary groups, including educational underachievement, but that more complex factors are also at play.

A number of DE's policies, along with their associated targets and milestones, are aimed at tackling the complex factors at play, including reducing educational underachievement, citizenship education and providing a more inclusive education system.

Ambitious targets are already in place in relation to improving educational outcomes and reducing educational inequality as set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016/21.

In response to your correspondence of 1 July on the same question, I provided further detail on a range of policies that contribute to the panel's recommendation on segregation in my reply of 20 July.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Education to detail (i) how many schools will be preparing pupils for academic selection; and (ii) how many will not.

(AQW 3119/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department does not hold data on the number of schools who will and will not prepare pupils for academic selection.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attending a non-selective secondary school attained 5 GCSEs grades A* to C in each year from 2009 to 2016.

(AQW 3130/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland. Figures for 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

The table below details the proportion of school leavers who attained at least 5 GCSEs A* - C (including equivalent qualifications) between 2009/10 and 2014/15, by those who attended grammar and non-grammar post-primary schools.

Percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications), 2009/10 – 2014/15^{(1) (2)}

Year	Grammar	Non-Grammar
2014/15	98.0	69.3
2013/14	97.3	65.2
2012/13	97.4	65.2
2011/12	97.2	61.3
2010/11	96.8	57.3
2009/10	97.0	54.8

Notes:

- 1 Excludes special and independent schools
- 2 The data provided are based on grammar and non-grammar schools. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attending a selective grammar school attained 5 GCSEs grades A* to C in each year from 2009 to 2016.

(AQW 3131/16-21)

Mr Weir: My Department collects information on the qualifications and destinations of all school leavers in Northern Ireland. Figures for 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

The table below details the proportion of school leavers who attained at least 5 GCSEs A* - C (including equivalent qualifications) between 2009/10 and 2014/15, by those who attended grammar and non-grammar post-primary schools.

Percentage of school leavers achieving at least 5 GCSEs A*-C (including equivalent qualifications), 2009/10 – 2014/15^{(1) (2)}

Year	Grammar	Non-Grammar
2014/15	98.0	69.3
2013/14	97.3	65.2
2012/13	97.4	65.2
2011/12	97.2	61.3

Year	Grammar	Non-Grammar
2010/11	96.8	57.3
2009/10	97.0	54.8

Notes:

- 3 Excludes special and independent schools
- 4 The data provided are based on grammar and non-grammar schools. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attending a non-selective secondary school stayed in school after GCSE in each year from 2009 to 2016.

(AQW 3132/16-21)

Mr Weir: The following table shows the percentage of pupils attending non-grammar schools that were doing a level 2 qualification (GCSE or equivalent) in the previous year and remained in the school system to study a level 3 qualification (A Level or equivalent) in the year stated.

2015/16	47.8
2014/15	47.2
2013/14	46.8
2012/13	47.4
2011/12	43.4
2010/11	43.5
2009/10	38.6

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- 6 The data provided is based on non-grammar schools only. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level. The Department does not hold data as to which pupils sat transfer tests or which pupils were academically selected (as this only occurs if the number of applications exceeds approved enrolments).
- 7 Pupils counted to calculate staying on rates for pupils in year 13 in 2015/16 are those that were in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15 and were in the first year of a level 3 qualification in 2015/16. This is divided by the number of pupils in the final year of a level 2 qualification in 2014/15. Pupils that repeat GCSEs are not counted as 'staying on'.
- 8 Pupils that move schools between these years are counted as 'staying on'.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Education what date the Strule Shared Education Campus is expected to be completed.
(AQW 3136/16-21)

Mr Weir: Based on the latest available procurement timetable the Strule Shared Education Campus is expected to be completed in summer 2020 and come into operation in September 2020.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Education what percentage of school leavers left school with no formal qualification in 2015-16.

(AQW 3172/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

Figures for 2014/15 are available in the publication below. Table 1 of the publication indicates that 0.4% of school leavers left school with no formal qualifications in 2014/15.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin>

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Education what percentage of school leavers went on to Further Education in 2015-16?
(AQW 3173/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

Figures for 2014/15 are available in the publication below. Table 14 of the publication indicates that, in 2014/15:

- the main destination of 42.3% of school leavers was Higher Education, and
- the main destination of 35.0% of school leavers was Further Education.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin>

Mr Aiken asked the Minister of Education what percentage of school leavers went on to Higher Education in 2015-16.
(AQW 3174/16-21)

Mr Weir: Information on the attainment of school leavers in 2015/16 will be available in May 2017.

Figures for 2014/15 are available in the publication below. Table 14 of the publication indicates that, in 2014/15:

- the main destination of 42.3% of school leavers was Higher Education, and
- the main destination of 35.0% of school leavers was Further Education.

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/school-leavers-201415-statistical-bulletin>

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attending non-selective secondary schools are entitled to free school meals.
(AQW 3198/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2015/16, 39.9% of pupils in non-grammar schools were entitled to free school meals.

Source: NI school census

Notes:

- 9 The data provided is based on non-grammar schools only. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level. The Department does not hold data as to which pupils sat transfer tests or which pupils were academically selected (as this only occurs if the number of applications exceeds approved enrolments).

Mr Kennedy asked the Minister of Education what percentage of pupils attending selective grammar schools are entitled to free school meals.
(AQW 3199/16-21)

Mr Weir: In 2015/16, 13.9% of pupils in grammar schools were entitled to free school meals.

Source: NI school census

Notes:

10. The data provided is based on grammar schools only. It is not possible to fairly and equally classify schools as being either selective or non-selective. The schools do not nominate themselves as being selective or non-selective; this information could only be derived via their admissions criteria. While academic selection would be part of the admissions criteria for most grammar schools (and vice-versa), this is not true in all cases. It is also not possible to categorise selection on a pupil level. The Department does not hold data as to which pupils sat transfer tests or which pupils were academically selected (as this only occurs if the number of applications exceeds approved enrolments).

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Education whether his Department must take account of the Rural Needs Bill when considering the closure of rural schools.
(AQW 3213/16-21)

Mr Weir: Any proposal to close or make a significant change to a school requires the bringing forward of a Development Proposal (DP) which initiates a statutory process that involves extensive consultation with all those who may be affected by the proposal.

Any published DP to close a school, including a rural school, is set within the context of Area Planning for education provision, the process by which the Department's Sustainable Schools Policy (SSP) is implemented. This policy was assessed against the Rural Development Council's rural proofing checklist set out in its report, *Striking the Balance*, before publication in 2009 and no adverse impact was identified.

The SSP recognises the needs of rural communities and this is reflected in a lower enrolment threshold for rural primary schools, an accessibility criterion which provides guidance on home to school travel times and a 'strong links with the community' criterion which recognises the central place a school has for many communities, both urban and rural.

My Department will continue to meet its legal obligations to give due regard to rural needs when reviewing the SSP and Area Planning process.

Department for the Economy

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for the Economy whether he will uphold the current ban on fracking, especially concerning sites in Fermanagh.

(AQW 388/16-21)

Mr Hamilton (The Minister for the Economy): The possible future deployment of high volume hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in Northern Ireland would be a matter for the Executive to decide on should the time come.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the need to remove bureaucracy for Small and Medium Enterprises.

(AQW 1104/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The previous Executive agreed a comprehensive action plan on regulatory reform in February 2016. Better Regulation: An Action Plan for Reform contains a number of actions designed to help reduce the regulatory impact on all businesses, including small, medium and micro enterprises.

I and my Executive colleagues are committed to the growth of the local economy and recognise the role that an efficient and unified regulatory regime can make to supporting this. Small and medium enterprises are the backbone of the NI economy and as such we will continue to identify ways of reducing regulatory bureaucracy from them, while retaining necessary protections for our citizens, the environment, employees and society.

Dr Farry asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans to develop a 14-19 statement or strategy with the Minister of Education in order to better co-ordinate the strengths of school, further education and other youth training to provide a wider range of options for young people.

(AQW 1117/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The new Programme for Government will provide both the Department for the Economy and the Department of Education the opportunity to review the education and training provision currently available for the 14-19 cohort. Officials from both Departments met on 17 June to have some preliminary discussions on this and other issues of mutual interest.

Any proposals for change to current arrangements will emerge in the context of the detailed development of the Programme for Government in the next few months.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will fund the clearing of large stones from Newcastle beach; and install a temporary beach for the summer period to increase tourism to the area.

(AQW 1179/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Newcastle beach is the responsibility of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and The Crown Estate. The surrounding area where a temporary beach installation would be sited would also be the responsibility of the council.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the Kelvin project in East Derry.

(AQW 1441/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Project Kelvin has increased competition in the Northern Ireland Telecommunications market and has encouraged private sector investment in new infrastructure.

The international connectivity provided by Project Kelvin is an important part of our telecoms infrastructure, putting Northern Ireland at the heart of the global economy.

Invest NI uses the benefits of the region's world class telecoms infrastructure, including the transatlantic link provided by Project Kelvin, to promote Northern Ireland as an attractive and viable location for new inward investment opportunities, and to secure additional projects from existing international investors. Importantly Coleraine is one of eight points of presence around Northern Ireland.

Invest NI does not hold information on which companies have chosen to take advantage of the transatlantic link. A previous survey found that approximately 25% of first time investors rated the transatlantic link as either crucial or a contributing factor to their investment decision.

It would not be unreasonable to assume it has been a key factor in influencing a similar proportion of more recent investors, particularly those in the ICT and Financial Services sectors where high-speed internet connectivity is crucial.

It is important to note however that telecoms infrastructure is just one of the factors that influence an investment decision. An investor will make this decision based on a number of factors, including the availability of a skilled workforce, availability of suitable office accommodation and other infrastructure issues.

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the number of meetings that Invest NI held with European Union officials per month, in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 1466/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI interactions with Commission Officials are routinely recorded, but records of these European Engagements, including those with the EC as part of the NI/EC Taskforce reporting, only commence from June 2014. The table below indicates the number of meetings held to date:

Year	Month	Number of Meetings
2014-15	June	1
	July	4
	August	1
	October	2
	November	2
	January	1
Total		11
2015-16	April	1
	May	4
	August	1
	September	3
	October	3
	November	3
	December	1
	February	3
Total		19

Mr Attwood asked the Minister for the Economy to detail the total financial assistance provided by Invest NI to new businesses in each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14; (ii) 2014/15; and (iii) 2015/16.

(AQW 1541/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Table 1 below details the amount of assistance that Invest NI has offered to new businesses in each Belfast constituency in (i) 2013/14, (ii) 2014/15, and (iii) 2015/16.

Table 1: Invest NI Assistance Offered (£m) to New Businesses in Belfast PCAS

PCA	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Belfast East	0.43	0.29	0.37
Belfast North	0.46	0.29	0.27
Belfast South	2.89	6.82	2.81
Belfast West	0.34	0.29	0.23

Note: Invest NI revises performance data on a regular basis to ensure that it reflects implemented projects; therefore, the data above may differ to previously published information.

Invest NI makes offers of support to companies based on business plans received. These offers are only paid to businesses once key milestones and targets have been met.

In addition to this assistance, in 2013-14 and 2014-15 Invest NI also offered advice and guidance to individuals wishing to start a business through the Regional Start Initiative delivered in conjunction with Enterprise Northern Ireland. Table 2 below details the number of business plans Invest NI approved through that scheme in the same areas.

Table 2: Invest NI Regional Start Approvals in Belfast PCAS

PCA	2013-14	2014-15
Belfast East	160	180
Belfast North	268	284
Belfast South	202	240
Belfast West	187	262

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for the Economy what immediate action his Department will take to mitigate the impact that the vote to leave the European Union will have on the economy.

(AQW 1759/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future challenges and opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what action he has taken to ensure trading opportunities across the island of Ireland are not compromised by the outcome of the European Union referendum.

(AQW 1762/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future challenges and opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for the Economy (i) to detail all projects (a) being completed and (b) scheduled for the future in East Derry that have received European Union funding or are scheduled to receive European Union funding; (ii) for his assessment of whether this funding is now at risk following the decision to vote to leave the European Union; and (iii) whether this funding, if at risk, will be provided through the Northern Ireland Executive or his Department.

(AQW 1817/16-21)

Mr Hamilton:

- (i) Details of all projects funded in the 2007-2013 period can be viewed at <http://successes.eugrants.org/>

Under the IGJ programme, Invest NI has supported four projects to date within East Londonderry. A further nine businesses in the area have availed of the Design Advice Service and Development Programmes. The full list of the projects and businesses supported are:

Organisation Name	Scheme
AVX Limited	Grant for Research & Development
Spatiallest Ltd	Grant for Research & Development
Annie's Traditional Food Ltd	Selective Financial Assistance
Skunkworks Surf Company	Co-Investment
Bags of Respect Ltd	Design Programme
Nonglak McFadden Ltd	Design Programme
Beasts Of War Limited	Design Advice
Sebastian McMichael t/a Bann Valley Flies	Design Advice
Thongs Limited	Design Advice
Patrick Elliott t/a Dunluce Golf	Design Advice
Nonglak McFadden Ltd	Design Advice
Segmat Ltd	Design Programme
A&M Foodservice Ltd	Design Advice

Two organisations in the East Londonderry constituency receive funding under the ESF 2014 – 2020 programme:

Strand	Organisation	Project Name
Unemployed/Economically Inactive	Enterprise NI	Exploring Enterprise Programme
Disability	Something Special	Diverse Ability

- (ii) It is anticipated that the EU Programmes will continue to operate during the UK / EU negotiation period.
- (iii) Treasury has confirmed that it will underwrite structural and investment funds projects signed before the Autumn Statement. Beyond that, priorities and funding will be the subject of negotiations between the NI Executive and the UK Government, and between the UK Government and the EU institutions.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans to protect and to promote the Dark Hedges.
(AQW 1902/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I fully recognise the importance of the Dark Hedges as a tourist destination in both the local area and the whole of Northern Ireland. My Department's remit is to promote the Dark Hedges.

The Dark Hedges are regularly promoted across Tourism NI's suite of consumer social media channels and typically receive extremely strong engagement.

Most recently, The Dark Hedges featured prominently in Tourism NI's collaborative marketing campaign with Tourism Ireland celebrating Season 6 of Game of Thrones®. An exciting feature of the campaign was a series of 10 intricately carved doors, depicting never-before-seen moments from the show. The doors were carved from the trees blown down at the Dark Hedges in winter storms and were unveiled in different locations as season six unfolded.

The videos associated with this campaign resulted in over 700,000 social media engagements.

Northern Ireland Screen has also developed a Game of Thrones® Filming Locations Northern Ireland app. The app showcases 22 publicly accessible filming locations including The Dark Hedges. The app is free to download on Google Play Store and the App Store. Tourism NI promotes this app across various promotional platforms when appropriate.

Northern Ireland Screen and Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council collaborated on the development of a series of Game of Thrones® interpretative panels. The panels are installed at Game of Thrones® filming locations which are publicly accessible within the council area including at The Dark Hedges.

The Dark Hedges also feature in a Causeway Coastal Route promotional video that has been published extensively across Tourism NI's suite of digital channels.

A number of blogs profiling The Dark Hedges have also been published as part of the broader Causeway Coastal Route experience.

The Dark Hedges will continue to feature prominently in both Tourism NI's and Tourism Ireland's dedicated Game of Thrones® promotional activity.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what steps he is taking to ensure that staff and students from European Union countries can continue to work and study at local universities now and after the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.
(AQW 1984/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for the Economy whether his Department will commission a programme of work to identify the legislation imposing European Union directives to be repealed when the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.
(AQW 2005/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future challenges and opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Mr McKee asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the implications of the result of the EU Referendum for (i) the Northern Ireland European Regional Development Fund (2014-2020); (ii) the Northern Ireland European Social Fund (2014-2020); (iii) the level of anticipated Foreign Direct Investment; (iv) higher education and research and innovation; (v) state aid rules; (vi) all other aspects of his departmental portfolio; and what contingencies are in place.
(AQW 2059/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future challenges and opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy to outline what work is underway to measure the impact of an exit from the European Union (i) directly within the Department; and (ii) on the overall economy.

(AQW 2095/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future challenges and opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy to outline his plans, in light of recent decisions by developers to delay development of commercial building sites in Belfast, to restore confidence in the market.

(AQW 2103/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI is not aware of any investment project where a commitment to proceed had been given and subsequently delayed.

You will be aware Invest NI launched its Grade A office accommodation loan/equity scheme in 2015. The agency continues to engage with the promoters of three new developments which, should they come to fruition, will introduce an additional c436,000 square feet of new Grade A office accommodation to the Belfast market.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister for the Economy to provide a copy of his departmental bid in the June monitoring round for (i) Capital DEL; and (ii) Resource DEL.

(AQW 2118/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The June Monitoring outcome was agreed following a series of discussions between departmental Ministers. This reflected a change of approach due to the new dynamic in the Executive with the presence of an official opposition. As such, there is not an official document that sets out departments' bids as was the case in previous mandates.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for the Economy to provide a copy of his departmental bid in the June monitoring round for (i) Capital DEL; and (ii) Resource DEL.

(AQW 2156/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The June Monitoring outcome was agreed following a series of discussions between departmental Ministers. This reflected a change of approach due to the new dynamic in the Executive with the presence of an official opposition. As such, there is not an official document that sets out departments' bids as was the case in previous mandates.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for the Economy what plans he has to ensure local universities are not negatively impacted as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union.

(AQW 2187/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Following the result of the EU Referendum my Department is considering the potential implications for its functions, legislation and regulations, in addition to identifying future opportunities.

The priority for the Executive will be to ensure Northern Ireland's interests are protected and advanced, and new opportunities are developed, as new arrangements are made.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy whether a reassessment has been made on the necessity to decommission part of Ballylumford B Power Station to comply with EU Directives.

(AQW 2388/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: At the end of 2015, 510 megawatts of capacity were decommissioned at the Ballylumford power station to comply with EU emissions legislation. However 250 megawatts of this capacity was replaced when some of the B station units were upgraded by owners AES in a reserve services contract with SONI.

While the UK remains within the EU, legislative requirements on emissions continue to apply. There has, therefore, been no reassessment of the necessity to decommission part of the capacity at the Ballylumford plant.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy what current storage capacity exists for home heating oil in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 2390/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The four oil terminals in Northern Ireland have current storage capacity for around 95,000 tonnes of home heating oil (kerosene). Oil distributors and some vehicle filling stations will also have storage capacity for home heating oil.

Mr Poots asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the measures being taken to reduce local energy costs.
(AQO 181/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Work to deliver lower cost energy prices is progressed through a combination of regulation and competition. Currently, it has to be recognised that energy costs within Northern Ireland are at a 6 year low.

Electricity prices for domestic customers are estimated to be around 13% lower than in the Republic of Ireland. For the smallest non-domestic consumer, our prices are slightly higher than the United Kingdom average and European Union median. They are, however, below those in the Republic of Ireland.

While our largest electricity customers' bills are towards the top end of the EU range they are, importantly, below the UK average.

Also, gas prices in Northern Ireland remain low and are competitive across most consumer groups.

It is important to clarify that energy prices are made up of three components. These comprise the wholesale commodity price, network charges and retail costs, the proportion paid varying for each customer type.

The wholesale commodity price is determined by trading on global markets. The Utility Regulator determines the amount paid by consumers for maintaining and improving the network over specified price determination periods. This ensures that investment is efficient and at least cost to consumers.

The retail margin is the charge for supplying energy. Prices paid by domestic and very small businesses in Northern Ireland are set through regulated tariffs for the incumbent gas and electricity suppliers.

It is important to note that prices paid by larger energy users are not subject to regulated tariff arrangements. These customers negotiate their requirements directly with suppliers and, consequently, there is less transparency around the prices they are paying.

I remain committed to ensuring that energy costs for all consumers in Northern Ireland remain as low as possible. To that extent, I am very carefully considering the recommendations in the recent Energy and Manufacturing Advisory Group report, and welcome the excellent progress being made in extending the natural gas network to both the West of Northern Ireland and East Down region.

However, it is my opinion that we need an informed debate around wider energy policy in Northern Ireland, on what we realistically expect our energy system to deliver and what aspects of it we are prepared to invest in. It is therefore my intention to initiate that wider debate over the coming months.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for the Economy to outline any foreign direct investment plans for South Down.
(AQO 182/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The Northern Ireland business investment proposition, which emphasises our skilled workforce, competitive operating costs and advanced infrastructure in a strategic location, continues to be promoted by our worldwide network of offices and partners.

Invest NI remains focused on promoting Northern Ireland as a great place to do business, encouraging international companies to set up and grow their operations. Statistics show 80% of new investors, in the past 5 years, have already reinvested in Northern Ireland.

In the current 2016-17 year, there have been 4 inward visits to the South Down area. Due to commercial sensitivities, details of prospective new inward investment projects cannot be released, as the projects are at an early stage of negotiation.

Ultimately, however, the location decision for inward investment is made based on a number of influencing factors. These include availability of skilled labour, existing clusters of similar companies and property or land availability.

Potential inward investors to South Down can look to the success of existing externally-owned companies such as Teleperformance, based in Newry, B/E Aerospace, based in Kilkeel, and First Derivatives, based in Newry, which is now a Public Limited Company.

In addition, there are many examples of successful indigenous companies in the South Down area such as Lynn's Country Foods, Critical Power Systems and Clonallon Laboratories Ltd.

The very strong entrepreneurial culture in South Down is evidenced by the support provided through Invest NI across the period 2011/12 to 2015/16.

During this five year period across the constituency Invest NI made a total of 1,166 offers of assistance totalling over £14.5 million which will deliver over £100 million of total investment in to the area. That would include 729 business starts over the same time period.

Of the total assistance offered, just under £13 million was offered to locally owned businesses, with the remaining £1.8 million directed towards externally owned businesses.

This pro-active intervention and support by Invest NI has helped create 1,227 jobs South Down between 2011/12 and 2015/16. These are real jobs in a range of positions across South Down.

Invest NI will continue to seek to bring new investors to South Down and will also to work closely with both the externally owned and indigenous businesses of the area their business and increase employment opportunities.

Ms Hanna asked the Minister for the Economy how he plans to ensure that the local agri-food industry is not impacted negatively by the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union.

(AQO 183/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The agri-food industry is one of the key sectors of our regional economy, with turnover of nearly £4.6 billion in 2015.

I know that this is an industry with opportunities and growth ambitions and it is vitally important that we make every effort to secure the best possible outcome for the sector as a result of Brexit.

The Executive has received assurances from the Prime Minister that Northern Ireland will be given its place in future talks which commence later this year. We will act in the best interests of Northern Ireland to ensure the agri-food industry is able to thrive.

Whilst there will undoubtedly be change, we are presented with many opportunities. I am determined to work closely with my Executive colleague Minister McIlveen to ensure that our agri-food industry flourishes as a central driver to our economy. Indeed, we have already established a joint Brexit Consultative Committee to ensure an effective exchange of information and views with the industry as the Brexit negotiations unfold, and have met with a number of industry representatives in recent weeks, including the Agri-Food Strategy Board, to discuss the way forward.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the current shortfall in funding for local universities.

(AQO 184/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: The financial sustainability of the higher education system in Northern Ireland has come under pressure over the last number of years.

Over the course of the previous Assembly term, a funding gap of between £1,000 and £2,500 per student, depending on the price band of their course, has emerged between Northern Ireland's universities and those in England, amounting to some £39 million in total terms in 2014/15.

In addition to this, in 2015/16, a further reduction of £16.1 million in public funding was passed to local higher education institutions, leading to an immediate reduction of approximately 540 full-time undergraduate places, which is due to be further reduced to some 2,260 in the next few years.

I intend to examine all available funding options over the coming weeks and months.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the impact Game of Thrones has had on tourism in the North West.

(AQO 185/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Northern Ireland Screen estimate the overall value of the production of Game of Thrones to the Northern Ireland economy to be £148 million since the show began.

Tourism NI has engaged screen tourism experts, Olsberg SPI, to complete a Screen Tourism Strategy for Northern Ireland which will help to assess and fully understand the tourism specific impact of Game of Thrones. The strategy, and associated statistics with regards to tourism impact, will be completed this autumn.

Game of Thrones is now the biggest TV show in the world, broadcast in 199 countries worldwide and watched by over 18.4 million viewers. Its global popularity offers a huge opportunity for Northern Ireland to position itself internationally and to promote our destination to a global audience.

Northern Ireland is the principal filming location and HBO headquarters using Titanic Studios, Belfast and Linenmill Studios, Banbridge as well as many spectacular locations across Northern Ireland. Twenty-two of these locations are publically accessible, three of which are located in the North West region including Binevenagh, Downhill Beach and Portstewart Strand.

The show has been the catalyst for business growth in Northern Ireland and has provided an opportunity for the tourism industry to develop new and innovative visitor experiences.

In 2013 Game of Thrones visitor experiences were not available now there are over twenty-four. These experiences range from guided coach tours, immersive experiences, food experiences and self-guided maps/ itineraries.

Many of the visitors explore the locations independently taking in the locations within the North West region.

Individual businesses report that they receive visitors from all over the world and that the demand is generally sustained throughout the year. Some of the more established operators have also reported that their Game of Thrones business has doubled in the past year which has allowed them to make further investments in developing their Game of Thrones offer.

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for the Economy what action he has taken to address the disparity in Invest NI funding between constituencies.

(AQO 186/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Invest NI's role is to support companies that bring forward viable and sustainable investment projects, based on merit irrespective of where they are based or located.

Invest NI assistance patterns are, therefore, driven by business demand; with businesses taking the decision to invest in a particular area believing that location offers the best opportunity to allow them to grow profitably. Areas with high concentrations of businesses, such as our cities, will understandably tend to receive a higher number of projects and, therefore, business support.

It is important to remember, however, that the benefits associated with business development are not constrained by local constituency boundaries. These are not self-contained labour markets and investment in one constituency will provide benefits across a much wider area. For example, the most recent Census showed that South Belfast drew its workforce from residents of all the other Parliamentary Constituency Areas in Northern Ireland.

You will no doubt be aware that the draft Programme for Government proposes an outcome entitled: 'We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy'. A key emphasis of this will be ensuring that economic growth benefits people across all of Northern Ireland. Through the next steps of the Programme for Government process, the aim will be to determine how all economic partners, such as central government, councils, local representatives, businesses and Invest NI, can help deliver this outcome.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister for the Economy for his assessment of the annual tourism statistics published in May and the quarterly statistics published in August of this year.

(AQO 187/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: I am very encouraged by the latest tourism statistics published by the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency which show a positive picture for local tourism in both the first quarter of 2016 and the 12 months to March 2016. These figures build on what was already a record year for tourism earnings for Northern Ireland in 2015 with £760 million of income generated.

I am pleased that in the year to March 2016 visitors spend rose further to £779 million in the local economy with 70% coming from external visitors - making tourism worth £549 million as an export business. This is an increase of 4% in overall visitor spend when compared to the year to March 2015.

The figures indicate that visitors have generally been staying longer and spending more leading to an increase in overall visitor expenditure in both Quarter 1 2016 and the year to March 2016. The increases in nights and spend have been driven by a continued increase in external visitors particularly from GB and overseas. This is in line with my strategic aim to grow average nights and average spend per night of external visitors and grow the export value from tourism

Total visitor numbers in Quarter 1 2016 did fall slightly overall and this is in line with industry feedback that it was a slightly quieter January to March in 2016. This was driven mostly by a fall in domestic overnight trips as the figures indicate that external visitors continue to rise with an increase of 9% in Quarter 1.

The decline in the Republic of Ireland market abated slightly in Quarter 1 2016 with an encouraging rise in visitor numbers from the Republic of Ireland but a continuing decline in tourism spend from the Republic of Ireland overall. A Republic of Ireland Taskforce made up of key business and media interests in the Republic of Ireland has been established by Tourism NI to assess what needs to be done to maximise visitors from this market.

Tourism performance remains positive as the momentum created over the last few years continues to build. We have hosted many successful events in recent years among them the Irish Open which will return here next year. As well as that we can look forward to hosting The Open in 2019. We also continue to work towards a successful bid to play our part in hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2023. Our tourism offering has also been enhanced with the new attractions opening such as the HMS Caroline heritage visitor museum in the Titanic Quarter.

This an important sector for our economy and I intend to bring forward a new Tourism Strategy later this year to work with the industry to build an internationally competitive and inspiring destination of which we are all proud.

Mr Kearney asked the Minister for the Economy to outline how he plans to secure the future of the local aerospace industry following the recent job losses at Bombardier.

(AQO 188/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: In February 2014, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment launched Northern Ireland Partnering for Growth, a regional strategy for the development of the aerospace, defence, security and space industry. This strategy, which was carefully formulated jointly by representatives from the four sectors, the industry trade body, ADS Northern Ireland and

Invest Northern Ireland, is being implemented successfully under 6 strategic themes. The strategy, which is fully aligned with the UK's strategies for these sectors, has two headline growth targets for the sector, to be delivered over 10 years:

- To double annual turnover from £1 billion to £2 billion
- To increase direct employment from 8,000 to 12,000

In a recent survey undertaken by ADS NI, figures show that annual turnover in the sector has grown to £1.3 billion and overall employment is now almost 10,000. I attended Farnborough Air Show in July this year in support of the show's largest ever Northern Ireland Aerospace presence and met many companies. Those discussions reaffirmed my belief that the sector is outward looking and ambitious and that Northern Ireland Partnering for Growth is the correct approach to support the development of these important sectors in the Northern Ireland economy.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for the Economy to outline the level of investment by Invest NI in North Belfast since 2011. (AQO 189/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: During the period 1st April 2011 to 31st March 2016 Invest NI offered assistance of almost £29m to North Belfast based businesses seeking its support. This support contributed towards investment commitments of over £214 million in the economy by these businesses.

Mr Aiken asked the Minister for the Economy, in light of recent job losses, for his assessment of the local manufacturing sector. (AQO 190/16-21)

Mr Hamilton: Job losses like those at Caterpillar, Bombardier, JTI and Michelin are devastating blows for those affected but it would be incorrect to think the manufacturing sector in Northern Ireland is declining.

The latest official statistics show that:

- Total manufacturing jobs are now at 80,000 for the first time since 2008
- Manufacturing sales stand at £18.1 billion, up 1.7%
- Manufacturing exports are up £350 million to £6.3 billion; and
- Manufacturing output is up 2.4%, outperforming the UK average.

Indeed, I have recently welcomed new job announcements in the manufacturing sector – specifically by Ballynahinch based company Datum Tool Design Ltd and Californian software firm BDNA Corporation,

In addition, my Department is currently taking forward the development of the refocused Economic Strategy which will highlight the particular importance of the manufacturing sector to the local economy and will set a clear direction for ensuring that the appropriate policy instruments are in place to support the sector.

There is a wide range of support available to the manufacturing sector and its sub sectors such as aerospace technology and material handling.

We have strategies in place for Agri-Foods, Aerospace, Health & Life Sciences, Advanced Manufacturing and Advanced Materials, all of which include manufacturing.

Department of Finance

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance to detail the current arrangements and costs, including the funding arrangements and costs, for the provision of official cars to Ministers and the payment of their drivers.

(AQW 2377/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance): The provision of official cars to Ministers is the responsibility of each individual Department and the information requested is not held centrally. I am therefore replying in relation to the Department of Finance only.

The Department of Finance provides an official car for my use and Sinn Féin provide the driver. The Department receives an invoice in respect of driver services in line with agreed rates, terms and conditions. The current rate is £2,807 per month, part of which is allocated for holiday cover in addition to the monthly payment to the driver.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Finance, pursuant to AQW 2024/16-21, what action has been taken to implement the NI Law Commission's recommendations on the regulation of property management agents.

(AQW 2409/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I am keen to progress a Managing Agents Bill to seek to address some of the difficulties that have arisen in relation to the management of common areas in apartment complexes. Significant work has been undertaken. Officials are involved in inter-departmental discussions with regard to the Northern Ireland Law Commission's recommendation on managing agents. An initial specification for a Register of Managing Agents has been drafted with a view to establishing costs and draft instructions are being worked on at present.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many Freedom of Information requests he has received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by his Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, his Special Adviser.

(AQW 2419/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir:

- (i) Since coming to office on 25th May 2016, there have been 77 FOI requests received by DoF.
- (ii) As of 13th September 2016, DoF has responded to 57 of the requests received, and the remaining 20 requests are still being processed.
- (iii) This information is not recorded.
- (iv) None of the above have been altered or amended either by, or at the request of, the Special Adviser.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Finance, given the widespread concerns that the current methodology underestimates the full extent of deprivation in rural areas, for an update on the review of the Multiple Deprivation Measure.

(AQW 2482/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The review of deprivation measures is being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) with the support of expert users and a Steering Group comprised of representatives from all Government Departments and from a wide range of Non-Departmental Public Bodies and District Councils.

There is a good rural representation in both the Steering Group and expert groups, with one expert group looking specifically at urban-rural issues. NISRA officials are aware of the rural concerns through engagement with rural representatives, from following the Assembly debate of the Private Members Motion on rural deprivation in September 2015, and from providing evidence to what was the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development in both December 2014 and February 2016.

Work to date has focused on investigating the indicators to be included within each of the seven deprivation domains, methodological development and securing access to essential data. It is planned to publish a consultation document in the autumn, setting out detailed proposals for the update, followed by a number of public consultation events.

Thereafter, the updated deprivation measures will be produced with the aim of publishing results in mid 2017, along with detailed supporting guidance for users. Tailored dissemination events will also be scheduled as appropriate to ensure that the results reach the widest possible audience and are both fully understood and utilised.

NISRA is also using its website and social media to keep key stakeholders updated on the progress of the update.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Finance to detail (i) the number of complaints his Department has received since January 2016 in relation to Concentrix; and (ii) any action taken to date.

(AQW 2503/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Since January 2016, my Department has not received any complaints in relation to Concentrix.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance to detail the Average Northern Ireland Personal Earning on the 1 April, for each of the last five years.

(AQW 2529/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) is the main source of earnings statistics locally and is carried out in April each year. The table below refers to median gross weekly earnings for all employees (full-time and part-time):

Table 1: Median gross weekly earnings for all employees

Year ¹	Median gross weekly earnings (£)
2011	354.5
2012	360.8
2013	365.5
2014	363.1
2015 ²	382.5

1 At April

2 Provisional data

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance to list the properties owned by his Department that are (i) in use; and (ii) surplus to requirement.

(AQW 2570/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The properties owned by my Department that are (i) in use; and (ii) surplus to requirement are listed below. The first table differentiates between office and non-office properties and the second indicates the position with the properties that are surplus to requirements.

(i) Properties in use:

Property	Property Type
22 Deverney Road, Omagh	Office
34 College Street, Belfast	Office
86 Main Street, Limavady	Office
Academy House, 121A Broughshane Street, Ballymena	Office
Adelaide House, 39-49 Adelaide Street, Belfast	Office
Andersonstown JBO, Kennedy Centre, 564-568 Falls Road, Belfast	Office
Antrim Jobs and Benefits Office, 20 Castle Street, Antrim	Office
Armagh Jobs and Benefits Office, 10-12 Alexander Road, Armagh	Office
Ballymena County Hall, 182 Galgorm Road, Ballymena	Office
Ballymena Jobs and Benefits Office, 2 Parkway, Ballymena	Office
Ballymoney Jobs and Benefits Office, 37-45 John Street, Ballymoney	Office
Ballynahinch Social Security Office, 18 Crossgar Road, Ballynahinch	Office
Banbridge Jobs and Benefits Office, 18 Castlewellan Road, Banbridge	Office
Careers Resource Centre, 56 Ann Street, Belfast	Office
Carrickfergus Jobs and Benefits Office, 1 Davy's Street, Carrickfergus	Office
Castle Barracks, 39 Wellington Place, Enniskillen	Office
Castle Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Causeway Exchange, 1-7 Bedford Street, Belfast	Office
Clare House, Sydenham Business Park, Belfast	Office
Clarence Court, Adelaide Street, Belfast	Office
Coleraine County Hall, 7 Castlerock Road, Coleraine	Office
Coleraine Jobs and Benefits Office, 8 Artillery Road, Coleraine	Office
Cookstown Social Security Office, 38-40 Fairhill Road, Cookstown	Office
Enniskillen County Building, 15 East Bridge Street, Enniskillen	Office
Craigtantlet Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
DfI, 1 Crescent Road, Londonderry	Office
Downpatrick Social Security Office, 9 -11 Mount Crescent, Downpatrick	Office
Dundonald House, Annexe B, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Dundonald House, Annexe C, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Dundonald House, Annexe D, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Dundonald House, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Dungannon Jobs and Benefits Office, 36 Thomas Street, Dungannon	Office
DVA, 148/158 Corporation Street, Belfast	Office
Elmview, 20 Derry Road, Strabane	Office
Enniskillen Jobs and Benefits Office, 14 Queen Elizabeth Road, Enniskillen	Office
Falls Road Jobs and Benefits Office, 19 Falls Road, Belfast	Office
Falls Standards Assurance Unit, 43-47 Falls Road, Belfast	Office
Fermanagh House, Ormeau Avenue, Belfast	Office

Property	Property Type
Foyle Jobs and Benefits Office, 14 Asylum Road, Londonderry	Office
Glenree House, Carnbane Industrial Estate, Tandragee Road, Newry	Office
Hillview Buildings, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Hollywood Road Jobs and Benefits Office, 106-108 Hollywood Road, Belfast	Office
HSENI, 83 Ladas Drive, Belfast	Office
Hydebank, 4 Hospital Road, Belfast	Office
Inishkeen House 21 Lough Yoan, Killyhelvin, Enniskillen	Office
Kilkeel Jobs and Benefits Office, 58 Newry Street, Kilkeel	Office
Knockbreda Jobs and Benefits Office, 210 Upper Knockbreda Road, Belfast	Office
Knockview Buildings, Blocks 1-5, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Laganside House, 23-27 Oxford St, Belfast	Office
Larne Jobs and Benefits Office, 35-51 Pound Street, Larne	Office
Limavady Jobs and Benefits Office, 9 Connell Street, Limavady	Office
Lisnagelvin Jobs and Benefits Office, 2 Crescent Road, Londonderry	Office
Lurgan Jobs and Benefits Office, 10 Alexandra Crescent, Lurgan	Office
Magherafelt Jobs and Benefits Office, 31 Station Road, Magherafelt	Office
Marlborough House, 2 Central Way, Craigavon	Office
Massey House, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Netherleigh, 1 Massey Avenue, Belfast	Office
Newcastle Social Security Office, 2 Beverley Gardens, Newcastle	Office
Newry Jobs and Benefits Office, 42 Bridge Street, Newry	Office
Newtownabbey Jobs and Benefits Office, 39-41 Church Road, Newtownabbey	Office
Newtownards Social Security Office, 8 East Street, Newtownards	Office
Northland House, 3 Frederick Street, Belfast	Office
Omagh County Hall, 5 Mountjoy Road, Omagh	Office
Omagh Jobs and Benefits Office, Mountjoy Road	Office
Orchard House, Foyle St, Londonderry	Office
Portadown Jobs and Benefits Office, 84 -140 Jervis Street, Portadown	Office
Queens Court, 56 - 66 Upper Queen's Street, Belfast	Office
Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor	Office
Rathkeltair House, 87 Market Street, Downpatrick	Office
Seatem House, 28-32 Alfred St, Belfast	Office
Shankill Rd Jobs and Benefits Office, 15-29 Snugville Street, Belfast	Office
Stormont Castle, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Stormont House & Annexes, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Strabane Jobs and Benefits Office, 18 Urney Road, Strabane	Office
The Cottages (Estates Office), Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
The Stables, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Unit 2, Walled Garden, Stormont Estate, Belfast	Office
Victoria Hall, 12 May Street, Belfast	Office
Waterside House, 75 Duke Street, Londonderry	Office

Property	Property Type
Stormont Estate, Boilerhouse connected to Greenhouse	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Bunker	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Children's Playground	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Courier Headquarters	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Fuel Farm	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Gate Lodge, 35 Massey Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Gate Lodge, Prince of Wales Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Maynard Sinclair Pavilion	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Peace and Reconciliation Water Fountain	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Public Toilet 1, Prince of Wales Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Public toilet 2, Massey Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Public Toilet, North End	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Reservoir	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Security Guards Kiosk - Massey Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Security Guards Kiosk - Stoney Road	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Security Guards Kiosk - Prince of Wales Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Security Guards Posts (Various)	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Sub-Station	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Summer House (at Carson's Statue)	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Summer House, Massey Avenue	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Water Booster	Non-office
Stormont Estate, Pump House, Stormont Castle	Non-office
Stormont Estate, VSD Caretakers House, 14 Stoney Rd	Non-office/ Residential
Stormont Estate, Villa 1, 37 Massey Avenue,	Non-office/ Residential
Stormont Estate, Villa 2, 39 Massey Avenue	Non-office/ Residential
Ballymena County Hall, Groundsman's House, 182A Galgorm Road, Ballymena	Non-office/ Residential
Ballymena County Hall, Caretaker's House, 7 Sourhill Road, County Hall, Ballymena	Non-office/ Residential

(ii) Properties Surplus to requirement:

Property	Comment
4-6 Killane Road, Limavady	Awaiting sale/disposal
Community Benefits Office, 29 Hillhead Road, Ballyclare	Awaiting sale/disposal

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Finance how many graduates are currently self-employed.
(AQW 2614/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: Official estimates of the number of self-employed people are sourced from the Labour Force Survey, which is a sample survey designed to provide labour market information for Northern Ireland in line with international standards. Official statistics show that in April – June 2016 there were an estimated 23,000 graduates who were self-employed.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Finance how many graduates are currently employed on a zero-hour contract.
(AQW 2615/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Labour Force Survey (LFS), which is a sample survey designed to provide labour market information in line with international standards, asks respondents whether they are on a “zero hours contract” in their main job.

However, due to sample size constraints, the survey is unable to provide a reliable estimate of the number of graduates employed on such contracts.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance which Departmental Accounts for the Year Ending 31 March 2016 have been Qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General; and to detail the reason given in each case.

(AQW 2655/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The following 2015/16 Departmental Annual Report and Accounts were qualified by the Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG).

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

DETI's accounts were qualified for two reasons.

Control weakness

The C&AG qualified the accounts due to insufficient evidence that the department's controls over the spending on the non-domestic Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) scheme were adequate to prevent or detect abuse of the system. Therefore he was unable to form an opinion whether the expenditure on the scheme had been applied for the purposes intended by the NI Assembly.

Delegations

The C&AG also qualified the accounts due to the department not receiving approval from DoF for £11.9M of the £30.5M spent on the RHI scheme.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

DARD's accounts were qualified for two reasons.

EU Funding

DARD's qualification arose as a result of financial corrections imposed by the European Union (EU) Commission totalling £17.4M, which the C&AG considered to fall outside of the NI Assembly's intentions in relation to the proper administration of EU funding and therefore deemed irregular. DARD's accounts have been qualified on this basis since the year ending 31 March 2010.

Insufficient Evidence

C&AG also qualified the accounts due to insufficient evidence to support a proportion of the disallowances accrued by the department. The C&AG considered that the introduction of the new direct payment schemes during 2015/16 introduced a significant element of uncertainty on the final amounts due. DARD however considered it had correctly accounted for the disallowances.

Department of Justice (DOJ)

Insufficient Evidence

DOJ's accounts were qualified as a result of insufficient evidence to support the estimate for provisions for legal aid liabilities shown in the accounts of Legal Service Agency Northern Ireland which were consolidated within DOJ's accounts.

Department of Social Development (DSD)

Control Weakness

DSD's regularity qualification arose from incorrect benefit awards and payment of fraudulent claims. This is a long-standing qualification and is similar to one that applies to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in Great Britain. The C&AG regards these incorrect payments are irregular as the expenditure has not been applied in accordance with the purposes intended by the NI Assembly.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Finance whether he intends to proceed with a one year budget.

(AQW 2774/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I wrote to Ministerial colleagues on 17 August, and to the Finance Committee on 5 September, outlining my intention to present a one year Resource DEL budget and a four year Capital DEL budget.

There are a number of significant public expenditure variables that would have the potential to destabilise a multi-year Resource DEL Budget. These include the British Government's adjustments of its fiscal targets following the EU referendum, their approach to Corporation Tax and the potential £3.5 billion of Public Expenditure cuts outlined by the previous Chancellor.

The First and deputy First Ministers have written, expressing their support for this approach to the Budget and the indications from other Ministers have also been positive, with acknowledgement that in the circumstances this way forward is a pragmatic one. In addition, both Scotland and Wales are adopting a one year approach in constructing their future Resource Budget.

I will therefore proceed with a one year Resource DEL budget and a four year Capital DEL budget.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance whether he will extend the Back in Business Rate support scheme beyond March 2017.

(AQW 2832/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The decision to extend the scheme beyond March 2017 will be taken in the context of upcoming budget.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance what actions he has taken in light of the NAMA-related allegations in the BBC Spotlight programme broadcast on 13 September 2016.

(AQW 2899/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I have written to the Taoiseach and the Finance Minister in the South assuring them of my Department's full co-operation in any investigation by the Irish Government.

I am also meeting with the NCA to obtain an update on how their investigation is proceeding, and to ensure that they have all of the information they need from my Department.

Mr K Buchanan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the number of staff that have left the Civil Service under the Voluntary Exit Scheme.

(AQO 212/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: A total of 2,996 staff exited under the NICS Voluntary Exit Scheme, during the period 30th September 2015 to 31st May 2016. These exits generated pay-bill savings of around £24million in 2015/16, with annual savings thereafter estimated to be in the region of £87 million. The Scheme has now closed.

Ms S Bradley asked the Minister of Finance how he will ensure that a regional balance is achieved in the distribution of public finance.

(AQO 213/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: In the short time that I have been in office I have met with local representatives across the North, including on issues relevant to the members' own constituency such as the Narrow Water Bridge. This level of engagement has given me a clear insight into the regional issues affecting our economy.

The Executive's draft Programme for Government highlights the need to improve the regional balance of our economy and this is a theme that will be carried through in the upcoming Budget process.

Mr Kelly asked the Minister of Finance to outline any discussions he has had with the Basque Treasury and Finance Minister.

(AQO 214/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I had a useful engagement with Ricardo Gatzagaetxebarria on 18 August at the Basque Government headquarters in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

During the meeting, we discussed areas of interest such as matters relating to the financial situation of the Basque Government and the Northern Ireland Executive, the tax status of both Governments in the framework of European regulation, along with the impact for both territories of the United Kingdom's referendum on the European Union.

Minister Gatzagaetxebarria also outlined the characteristics of the specific financial and tax system of the Economic Agreement, which regulates the relations between the Basque Autonomous Region and the Spanish State in those areas.

The Executive has already benefited from the work of Professor Rafael Bengoa, who served as Minister for Health and Consumer Affairs in the Basque Government from 2009 to 2012, and I am keen to benefit more from the experience of this region. To further this relationship I have invited Minister Gatzagaetxebarria to the North on 21 October when it is hoped he will also be able to meet with colleagues from Scotland and Wales.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Finance whether he has had any discussions with the Minister of Justice regarding the PSNI budgetary position.

(AQO 215/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: As part of the normal Budget development process I have engaged with a number of my colleagues over the course of the last few months to discuss relevant issues.

As part of this process I have engaged with Claire Sugden, Minister for Justice to identify and discuss her budget issues going forward, this included the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) budgetary position.

Following this DOJ and PSNI officials delivered a briefing session to my officials providing a clearer insight into the PSNI budget.

Going forward my Officials will continue to engage with Department of Justice (DOJ) Officials in developing a budget position for DOJ in line with the process and timeline for all departments.

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Finance for an update on the Executive's art collection.

(AQO 217/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Civil Service Art Collection comprises over 1,400 works, most of which are in places where the public will never see them.

I am determined to ensure the collection is more accessible and can be viewed by a wider audience. I wish to understand its cultural importance and ensure it is preserved for future generations.

I am considering refreshing the collection in a way that will help support emerging local artists.

Mr Bell asked the Minister of Finance to outline his plans following the decision of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union.

(AQO 218/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I, along with the Executive, am committed to the safeguarding of EU funding to the North. It is my priority to protect the monies allocated to the cross border PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes.

The Irish Government has also affirmed its commitment to the successful implementation of these programmes and, jointly with my counterpart in the South, I have written to the European Commission outlining our continuing support and requesting a meeting to support our case.

I have written to the Chancellor of the Exchequer reinforcing the North's need and entitlement to the full benefit of the EU Programme allocations. This position was reiterated in recent meetings with the Secretary of State for Exiting the EU and the Secretary of State for the North. I have also had trilateral meetings with my counterparts in Scotland and Wales and we have agreed to work together to protect EU funding streams.

I have met with the European Investment Bank Vice President, Jonathan Taylor, to seek assurances that the EIB would continue to invest in the local economy, following the outcome of the EU referendum.

My officials have engaged with Treasury seeking clarification on funding implications of the decision to leave the EU and this will continue as we approach the Autumn Statement on 23 November. This work will include confirming to Treasury the extent of EU funding expected by the Executive in the years ahead.

I have held a number of roundtable meetings with business leaders in the North and have met a number of project applicants and stakeholders to encourage them to continue to progress their applications. I have assured them that I will do all that I can to maximise our EU funding drawdown.

On a weekly basis I meet my officials to monitor progress on plans for the development and approval of programmes and I have instructed that they work with the Special EU Programmes Body, the Managing Authority for the programmes, to continue to progress applications so that final decisions can be made on projects. To assist this process I have introduced a number of steps to shorten the timescales for assessment of applications—increasing financial delegations given to departments and the provision of short term targeted expertise to ensure robust and timely economic assessment.

I intend to be fully involved in discussions with the governments in Dublin, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London and with the European Commission on the issue of EU membership and I will vigorously defend our local interests in those discussions. I can assure you that I will continue do all in my power to secure the funding that was allocated to these programmes at the outset.

Mr Kearney asked the Minister of Finance for an update on European Union funding.

(AQO 219/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes have been approved to the value of €269m and €283 million respectively.

The EU Referendum result has resulted in uncertainty for those hoping to benefit from funding under PEACE IV and INTERREG VA. Whilst the British Treasury has provided a guarantee for projects approved before the Autumn Statement, it offers no certainty for projects after that date. I am, however, determined that we obtain the maximum benefit from the programmes.

To that end, I have initiated plans and agreed the introduction of a number of new measures to expedite project approvals to avail of the opportunities, albeit somewhat limited, provided by the British Treasury statement. I have instructed my officials to implement actions to speed up assessment, including greater financial delegations to Departments, the establishment of a dedicated team of economic expertise to ensure robust and timely assessment, and I am meeting officials on a weekly basis to track and monitor progress. I have also jointly written, along with my counterpart in the South, to the EU Commission seeking a meeting to put our case and will ensure that the North's interests are fully represented in discussions between the devolved administrations, the Irish Government, the British Government and the European Union.

Currently, both the PEACE IV and INTERREG VA programmes are open for calls and Steering Committees have begun to convene to take final decisions on projects. It remains vital that we maximise the EU funding available and deliver those projects on the ground that make a significant contribution to our society.

Mr Douglas asked the Minister of Finance for his assessment of the domestic and non-domestic rating system.

(AQO 220/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: In terms of the rating system as a whole I see revaluation as a key issue. I have recently sought the agreement of the Executive to undertake Revaluations of both sectors at the earliest opportunity, subject to the very tight budgetary position we find ourselves in.

In terms of the non domestic rating system my priority is for better targeting of support to stimulate economic activity and regeneration, in line with our emerging priorities for the Programme for Government; rather than simply preserving all the broadly based relief entitlements that have grown up over many years. For instance, I am looking at changes to the empty property rate and ways that derelict property can be charged, not simply to raise more money but to help avoid the blighting of our towns and cities.

On the domestic side of rating, I am examining a range of measures in order to have a fairer distribution of the rates burden; protecting those least able to pay rates when Universal Credit comes along, as well as ensuring that those who can afford to contribute some more, do so. My officials are also evaluating the effectiveness of the current arrangements for landlord liability and the District Rates convergence scheme, now in its second year.

I look forward to presenting a series of detailed proposals to the Assembly over the coming months and bring forward the necessary legislation. I hope I can secure your support in my endeavours to modernise and improve the rating system during this mandate.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance to outline the Special EU Programme Body's forward work plan.
(AQW 2997/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: The Special EU Programmes Body is managing the delivery of the cross-border European Union Structural Funds Programmes in the North, the Border Region of Ireland and parts of Western Scotland, on behalf of the Member States and the European Commission.

Work is currently underway to close the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes (2007-2013), and to prepare the final reports on these for submission to the European Commission by 31 March 2017.

The PEACE IV and INTERREG VA Programmes (2014-2020) have launched, calls for projects have opened and assessment under various themes and objectives is underway. Decisions are continuing to be taken on projects that are considered to be eligible and can deliver outputs as outlined in the calls for funding.

Whilst the EU Referendum has introduced a degree of uncertainty, the Body is working with the Executive, the Irish and Scottish Governments to ensure that it maximises the drawdown of the available European funding.

Full details of the Programmes, time scales and key dates can be found on the SEUPB website at: www.seupb.eu

Ms Mallon asked the Minister of Finance what impact the Office for National Statistics reclassification of Housing Associations will have on the block grant.
(AQW 3187/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir: I do not anticipate that a reclassification from the private to public sector will have an impact on the level of block grant received. However, there will be an impact on how the bodies are treated in departmental budgets, with the subsequent net borrowing of the bodies requiring Capital DEL budget cover.

My Department is working closely with the Department for Communities and the Treasury to minimise the impact of the classification decision.

Department of Health

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) number; and (ii) location of beds available for children's mental health admissions other than those at Beechcroft.
(AQW 2334/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Health): At 31st July 2016, there were no beds available for children's mental health admissions other than those in Beechcroft.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health what plans she has to increase the number of beds for children's mental health admissions at Beechcroft, Belfast.
(AQW 2335/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no plans at present. Of the total number of young people who are treated by CAMHS, approximately 3-4% require an admission and Beechcroft has sufficient capacity to meet this need.

The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) commissioned an independent review of Beechcroft and Acute Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) which reported in 2014 and which confirmed that no additional in-patient beds were required, but that the current level should be sustained with the further strengthening of Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment services.

The HSCB invests £2.5M recurrently to maintain fully operational Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment teams in all Trusts.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health whether her Department plans to implement the recommendations set out in the Government's GP led Working Group Report to increase (i) the General Practice work force by four hundred posts by 2020; (ii) investment in General Practice to 11 per cent of the total health budget; and (iii) the number of GP training places.

(AQW 2359/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I am currently giving careful consideration to the recommendations contained in the report of the working group which reviewed the challenges facing GP-led services in the north of Ireland. The Report may be viewed on the Department's website at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/review-gp-led-primary-care-services.pdf>

It does not set specific targets for increases to the GP workforce or for levels of investment in general practice.

The group does recognise the need for further increases to the number of GP training places building on the additional investment secured this year which has seen the number of GP training places rise from 65 to 85 per year.

I am committed to developing a long-term plan to ensure that GP services can continue to provide high quality care to the population on a sustainable basis.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health what action her Department is taking following a number of recent suicides in the Western Health and Social Care Trust region.

(AQW 2365/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The recent suspected deaths by suicide in the Western Health and Social Care Trust area have been reported to the Trust and the Public Health Agency through the Sudden Death Notification process. This has ensured that early practical and emotional support has been offered to the bereaved families by the Trust's Family Liaison Service.

Ongoing suicide prevention services continue to be delivered in the Western Trust area. These include Lifeline, self-harm intervention services, suicide awareness and intervention training, media monitoring, public information campaigns, and community led counselling programmes.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health to detail the (i) allocated budget; and (ii) the budget spent on adult learning disability services in the Western Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2366/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is provided in the Table below.

	2011/12 (£)	2012/13 (£)	2013/14 (£)	2014/15 (£)	2015/16 (£)
Allocated Budget	23,146	24,762	26,106	25,788	30,363
Budget Expenditure	23,947	25,094	27,703	28,678	30,725

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Health for an update on the action taken to redress the adult learning disability underspend in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2367/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I continue to take very seriously the concerns of families and carers about the funding of adult learning disabilities in the Western HSC Trust and I have been closely monitoring the Trust's actions. I have also recently written to the Chief Executive of the Trust, emphasising the need to restore confidence by resolving this issue in a robust and transparent way in partnership with families. Whilst work is still ongoing to determine the extent of any underspend, the Trust has taken a number of steps to begin to address this issue. These include the development of a phased investment plan in adult learning disability services. In the immediate term, £3m is being invested to secure additional professional and support staff, and to address the priority needs of those transitioning into adult services, by (among other things), increasing day opportunities and day centre support.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future provision of stroke services at the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 2369/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Western Health and Social Care Trust currently has no plans to change stroke services in the South West Acute Hospital.

A Regional Review of Stroke Services has been undertaken by the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA). My Department is working with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) and Public Health Agency (PHA) to develop a new model for stroke services in light of the RQIA's recommendations. Following public consultation, I will make a decision regarding the implementation of the new model.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health for an update on the progression made in tendering Domiciliary Care contracts in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2370/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A Notice of Intention to award the contracts for the provision of domiciliary care was issued by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to all tenderers on 1 March 2016, following completion of the evaluation process. However, since then High Court proceedings have been received by the Trust triggering the automatic suspension of the award of the contracts.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of cancelled operations in each Health and Social Care Trust, broken down by hospital.

(AQW 2372/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information collected on the total number of elective operations cancelled for both non-clinical and other reasons from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016 has been provided in the table below.

Non-clinical reasons for cancellation include: list over-run; emergencies/trauma; equipment failure/unavailable, etc. Other reasons include patient cancellation, and patient clinically unsuitable to undergo procedure, though these lists are not exhaustive.

**Elective operations cancelled* for non-clinical and other reasons by HSC Trust and Hospital:
January 2015 to March 2016**

HSC Trust	Hospital	Operations Cancelled for non-clinical reasons	Operations Cancelled for other reasons
Belfast	Belfast City	894	1,412
	Mater	246	445
	Musgrave Park	310	1,025
	Royal Group	1,561	1,693
Northern	Antrim	401	755
	Causeway	385	636
	Mid Ulster	100	467
	Whiteabbey	100	427
South Eastern	Ulster	281	840
	Ards	34	651
	Lagan Valley	65	786
	Downe	33	617
Southern	Craigavon	306	533
	Daisy Hill	110	331
	South Tyrone	91	490
Western	Altnagelvin	506	1,489
	South West Acute	157	377
	Tyrone County	0	1,163

Source: P9 Cancelled Operations Return

* Includes only elective operations which were cancelled on the day of, or up to two days prior to the planned operation.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether the helipad on the roof of the Critical Care Centre, Royal Victoria Hospital will be fully operational before the North West 200 in 2017.

(AQW 2378/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is not possible, at this stage, to confirm if the helipad on the roof of the Critical Care Centre at the Royal Victoria Hospital will be fully operational for the NW200 event in May 2017. NIAS are still completing the business case for the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service. Once this has been approved the design and construction of the helipad is currently estimated at 6 – 9 months at a cost of approximately £750k - £800k.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health to detail her Department's strategy for reducing orthopaedic waiting lists in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2392/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board is working with all Trusts to take forward a range of initiatives to reform the way in which outpatient services are delivered.

Initiatives specific to orthopaedics include:

- Waiting list validation of all patients waiting over 9 months;
- Increasing orthopaedic Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) capacity to ensure all routine back/spinal referrals are assessed initially by an ICATS practitioner;
- Developing regional outpatient referral guidance using the British Orthopaedic Association Clinical Commissioning guideline with the Clinical Communication Gateway system;
- Increasing the roll-out and uptake of E-triage which will reduce the demand for new outpatient slots;
- Exploring the referrals for advice option for a range of subspecialties.

The recent review of the orthopaedic medical workforce highlighted the current shortfall in Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) consultant posts and a range of appointments have been made across the Trusts to address this including a locum Orthopaedic consultant post in the Western Trust.

My Department is working closely with the Health and Social Care Board in developing an elective care plan to arrest the decline in elective waiting times and deliver sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialties.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health to outline her priorities for improving the support that is available for people living with cancer.

(AQW 2405/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: More people are now living with a cancer diagnosis; an indication that things are changing for the better. Tackling cancer is and will remain a priority for me and my Department. It is important that patients and their families receive the holistic support they need to meet their clinical and emotional needs.

Clinical nurse specialists work at the front line of cancer care, providing patients with support during and after treatment. They play a vital role in the coordination of care and successful implementation of initiatives to improve cancer services. I want that excellent work to continue and that is why my Department, in collaboration with Macmillan cancer Support and the Friends of the Cancer Centre, recently announced an £11.5million expansion to the specialist cancer nursing workforce, creating around 60 new specialist cancer nursing and support worker posts over the next five years. District Nursing Services provided through HSC Trusts provide valuable support to patients living with cancer in community settings. Cancer support is also available from a range of charitable organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Support and Hospice services.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of services that support people living with cancer.

(AQW 2406/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: More people are now living with a cancer diagnosis; an indication that things are changing for the better. Tackling cancer is and will remain a priority for me and my Department. It is important that patients and their families receive the holistic support they need to meet their clinical and emotional needs.

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Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health whether she intends to publish the new Cancer Services Framework.

(AQW 2407/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The revised Cancer Services Framework is currently under development. Once the draft Framework is completed it will be launched for formal consultation. Following an analysis of the consultation responses, and any subsequent amendments being made, the finalised Framework will then be published by my Department for implementation.

Ms P Bradley asked the Minister of Health for an update on the new Cancer Services Framework led by the Chief Medical Officer.

(AQW 2408/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The revised Cancer Services Framework is currently under development. Once the draft Framework is completed it will be launched for formal consultation. Following an analysis of the consultation responses, and any subsequent amendments being made, the finalised Framework will then be published by my Department for implementation.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health for an update on the digitisation of health records.

(AQW 2410/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The HSC has made good progress on the digitisation of health and care records over the past 5 years. In addition to digital care systems in general practice and for radiology services, the award-winning Electronic Care Record system went live on 4 July 2013. It operates as a 'portal', drawing information from different systems across the HSC, and has a record for every service user with a Health and Care Number. More than 18,000 health and social care professionals are now using the system and the number of patient records viewed currently stands at 1,052,000, or approximately 57% of the population of the North.

Consideration is currently being given to how best to build on the progress we have made, with a key option being to invest in a more fully integrated electronic health and care record solution.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to reduce the burden of GPs as the first point of contact by allowing patients to access directly services such as specialist nurses or physiotherapists.
(AQW 2411/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise that GP services are under pressure and I am committed to taking action to address the challenges GPs face. In doing so, it will be important to continue to build the range of professionals working alongside GPs to provide care to patients.

A number of actions are already underway in this regard, including a five-year initiative to invest in practice-based pharmacists. This initiative will see additional investment in 2016/17 of £2.55m, rising to £14million per year in 2020/21, to put close to 300 pharmacists in GP practices. The scheme will utilise the skills and experience of pharmacists to help people optimise their medicines management and to help reduce prescribing costs. It will also free up GPs' time to focus on those patients who most need to see a GP, and ensure that others can access timely, high quality advice from the most appropriate health professional.

£1.8million has been allocated in 2016/17 to help manage patients with complex needs in primary care. These patients will be managed by teams of professionals—including, for example, physiotherapists, nurses, mental health professionals and pharmacists—to provide high quality care and advice to patients and help to keep them well, thereby reducing the pressures on GP practices and avoiding hospital admissions.

A direct access physiotherapy scheme was piloted in the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust from June 2015 until June 2016. An evaluation of the pilot is currently with the Health and Social Care Board for consideration.

My Department has also commissioned Ulster University to provide an advanced nurse practitioner (ANP) training programme, to include pathways for primary care. ANPs can autonomously assess, diagnose, treat and discharge or refer patients, and as such have a valuable role to play in the management of patients in primary care.

The Departmental-led working group set up to review GP services recognised the need to continue to build the skills mix working alongside GPs. I am currently considering the working group's findings as I seek to ensure everyone here continues to have access to high quality, sustainable GP-led services.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to review and reduce bureaucracy on General Practice in areas such as Quality and Outcomes Framework and appraisals.
(AQW 2412/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Over the last number of years, efforts have been continuing to reduce the administrative tasks GPs are required to complete, while at the same time incentivising the best possible health outcomes and ensuring safe, high quality care.

The number of Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) indicators has been reduced from 148 in 2012/13 to 63 in 2016/17. The number of QOF points has been reduced from 1,000 in 2012/13 to 547 in 2016/17, with a resultant transfer of approximately £19m into core funding for GPs and a reduction in administrative overheads.

My Department has no plans to make any changes to the appraisal process for GPs. Revalidation for all doctors is a requirement of the GMC as the doctors' regulator and annual appraisal is part of this requirement.

Developments in information technology have also helped to reduce paperwork and free up GP time for those patients who most need to see them. Computerisation in GP practices and the rollout of the Electronic Care Record has facilitated information sharing, helping to avoid unnecessary duplication of tests and investigations. The introduction of the Clinical Communications Gateway means that GP practices can refer electronically to consultant-led secondary care services, removing paper-based referrals. An online triage system is currently being piloted in a number of GP practices here, helping to ensure that patients are directed to the most appropriate source of advice and care within their GP practice. As a result, those patients who do need to see a GP can obtain an appointment quickly. Online booking of appointments and repeat prescription systems are also being rolled out to all practices that wish to adopt them, meaning that patients can make an appointment with their GP practice or order a repeat prescription online at a time that is convenient for them, without having to telephone their surgery.

The recent review of GP-led services here recognised that GPs can spend a proportion of their time carrying out administrative and other duties that could otherwise be spent on direct patient care. That review made a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the pressures facing GPs, including actions to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. I am currently giving careful consideration to the review's findings as I seek to ensure that everyone here continues to have access to high quality, sustainable GP services.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health whether she plans to give GPs greater ability to refer patients directly to an appropriate hospital department rather than the patient first having to attend an Emergency Department.

(AQW 2413/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: GPs and Health and Social Care Trusts continue to work together through Integrated Care Partnerships to consider the best care pathways for patients with various conditions. There are already a number of options for GPs to discuss direct admission to hospital with the relevant clinical team. For example, GPs within the Belfast area can make direct referrals to Belfast City Hospital for elderly patients and those with respiratory conditions, the Southern HSC Trust operates a rapid access respiratory service, and the Western HSC Trust provides direct referral to a chest pain assessment service. There is also an oncology helpline available to GPs across the North which can facilitate direct readmission for patients having cancer treatments.

In addition to direct referrals to hospital, there are a number of options for GPs to make referrals directly to community-based services where this is appropriate, meaning that the patient can be seen and managed in their own home and does not have to go to hospital. However, while direct referral from GPs to secondary care has proven beneficial in some specialities it is also recognised that emergency departments may be the most appropriate point of referral for patients who need to be assessed and stabilised prior to admission.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many children have been sent to England for treatment for mental health issues over the last two years; and at what cost.

(AQW 2422/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of children aged under 18 that have been sent to England for treatment for mental health issues, and the costs over the last two years is detailed in the table below:

Year	Number*	Cost
2014/15	10	£1.78m
2015/16	6	£1.60m

Source: HSCB

* It is not possible to add figures for both years together, as a number of children received treatment in both 2014/15 and 2015/16.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of child mental health beds.

(AQW 2423/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: At 31st July 2016, there were 33 mental health beds available regionally for young people aged 18 years and under.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how much funding is available annually for children's mental health services.

(AQW 2424/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- The investment for 2015/16 in CAMHS totalled £19,574,861. This investment covered all CAMHS community-based provision, the regional in-patient unit at Beechcroft and regional specialist services including the Gender Identity service, the Forensic CAMHS service and the Family Trauma Centre.
- There was a further £50k investment for CAMHS training in psychological therapies.
- In addition to these investments, it should be noted that the Public Health Agency also invests in drug and alcohol service provision and suicide prevention services for children and young people.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of children's mental health outpatient appointments in the last two years.

(AQW 2425/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: During 2014/15 there were 77,291 child and adolescent mental health outpatient appointments scheduled within the North of Ireland. In 2015/16, there were 79,542 outpatient appointments scheduled.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many children's mental health consultants are employed in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2426/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of children's mental health consultants employed in each Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust is detailed in the table below.

Children's Mental Health Consultants Employed

HSC Trust	Headcount	Whole Time Equivalent
Belfast & South Eastern	13	12.5
Northern	6	5.4
Southern	6	4.7
Western	6	3.7
Total	31	26.3

Source: HSC Trusts

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister of Health how the Bengoa review into Health and Social Care will impact the South West Acute Hospital.

(AQW 2447/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The reconfiguration of Health and Social Care (HSC) is an important and complex matter that will impact on all parts of the North. This is about more than hospitals. It is about the radical transformation of health and social care and it is necessary to safeguard our HSC for this and future generations. I am taking time to consider fully the implications of the recommendations made throughout the report. Alongside the Panel's report I will publish my vision piece.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister of Health (i) whether ultrasound and foetal medicine services are available in all hospitals; (ii) whether these services are offered to all pregnant women; and (iii) to list the hospitals in which these services are available and in which are they not.

(AQW 2461/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Ultrasound services are offered to all pregnant women and are available in all hospitals in the North which have a maternity unit; namely:

- Northern Trust: Antrim Area and Causeway Hospitals.
- Western Trust: Altnagelvin, Tyrone County and South West Acute Hospitals.
- Southern Trust: Craigavon Area and Daisy Hill Hospitals.
- South Eastern Trust: Ulster, Lagan Valley and Downe Hospitals.
- Belfast Trust: Royal Jubilee Maternity Service and Mater Hospital.

Fetal medicine services are offered to women who have been identified as having a high risk pregnancy or a baby with a suspected abnormality and are available in one centre in each Trust area; namely:

- Northern Trust: Antrim Area Hospital.
- Western Trust: Altnagelvin Hospital.
- Southern Trust: Craigavon Area Hospital
- South Eastern Trust: Ulster Hospital.
- Belfast Trust: Royal Jubilee Maternity Service.

Women attending other maternity units are referred to the Trusts' fetal medicine centre if required.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health whether there is any provision for including next-of-kin or direct family members in addressing the counselling needs of people expressing suicidal thoughts.

(AQW 2479/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A number of initiatives delivered by the Public Health Agency under the Protect Life strategy make provision for including family members in addressing the counselling needs of people expressing suicidal thoughts and those who self-harm. These include counselling delivered through the 'Lifeline' service and through the regional Self Harm Intervention Programme. The latter offers advice to family members on how to support the person who self-harms and how next-of-kin/carers should take care of their own mental wellbeing.

The Agency also distributes to hospital and GPs a booklet designed for people who self-harm and their families 'Caring for someone who has self-harmed or had suicidal thoughts'. This booklet provides information on services, the assessment process, and how families can contribute to supporting someone in this situation.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Health to outline the requirements for the guidance which is given to women prior to urogynaecological surgery regarding the possible side effects and complications of surgical mesh tape.

(AQW 2508/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: It is necessary that patients are provided with a full indication of the risks, benefits and side effects of any intervention, so that they can provide or withhold their consent as they see fit. This is governed by Departmental guidance on consent as well as that from the relevant professional regulator. In addition, NICE, has produced clinical guidelines on the management of urinary incontinence in women, endorsed by my Department in 2013.

Ms Archibald asked the Minister of Health whether consideration is being given by her Department to make available continuous monitoring for children with type 1 diabetes; and when this will be introduced.
(AQW 2509/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board is planning to introduce Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM) in line with NICE guidance (NG18) from 1 January 2017 for children and young people with Type 1 diabetes who meet the criteria for CGM described by NICE.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of patients having to travel over 80 miles to receive treatment when the procedure required is available at the Downe Hospital, three miles from the patients' home.
(AQW 2522/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Health and Social Care Trusts may offer patients a referral to another hospital which is further away because waiting times there are shorter, or may offer a referral to an independent sector provider where a Trust has contracted with them to provide additional capacity to help reduce waiting times. I would expect Trusts to exercise judgement in relation to individual circumstances as far as possible and where these are known to the Trust; however this may result in a longer waiting time for the patient.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health to detail (i) the minimum age for a young person to formally leave an in-care facility or foster placement; (ii) the support in place for young people in this position; (iii) whether there is an arrangement or availability for a hostel placement with supervision or assistance either in-house or on-hand; and (iv) whether there is a standard procedure in these instances or variance across the Health and Social Care Trusts.
(AQW 2534/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) There is no minimum age for a young person to formally leave a care placement. A "Looked After Child" (LAC) under a Care Order can remain in care up to age 18, unless their Care Order has been discharged before their 18th birthday. A child who is a LAC and accommodated under a voluntary arrangement can leave care at any age up to the age of 18 with the approval of their corporate parent (HSC Trust) if satisfactory arrangements have been made to care for them such as returning home to live with their parents. A decision on a formal discharge from care involves all key professionals involved with the young person.
- (ii) Availability and form of support for young people leaving care is based on concurrent LAC Care Planning, LAC 16+ Pathway Planning and the outcome of Risk Assessment processes. Planning and assessment involves a range of professionals, including a Personal Advisor appointed to look after the young person's interests. Support is based on an assessment of need, including financial needs, and, for those aged 16+, includes support with accommodation, education and training, materials for education and training, travel to / from college, child care support for a young parent, the provision of items for accommodation, and rental costs.
- (iii) There are a range of supports for young people leaving a care placement, including:
 - The Going the Extra Mile Scheme (GEM) which promotes continuity and stability living arrangements in post-care life for young people living with foster carers/kinship carers by ensuring that appropriate and levels of financial support are available to assist foster carers to continue to meet the care, accommodation and support needs of those young people until they reach the age of at least 21.
 - A range of Jointly Commissioned Young People's projects have been developed specifically for young people aged 16-21 years which offer an alternative to mainstream care placements, as well as vulnerable adults aged 18-21 plus, where it is assessed that their needs can best be met in a living environment that affords age and developmentally appropriate experiences in preparation for adult life. The projects' remit was expanded to include care leavers and young homeless people and recognises the need for an appropriate level of supervision and continuing care.
 - Provision of tenancies in the private sector and social housing sections that are aligned to the young person's needs.
- (iv) Each HSC Trust provides broadly similar services but there may be a degree of variation which reflects demand, locality, population profile and availability of services.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health whether consideration had been given to providing diabetes sensors via the NHS.
(AQW 2537/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board is planning to introduce Continuous Glucose Monitoring (CGM) systems in line with NICE guidance (NG18) from 1 January 2017 for children and young people with Type 1 diabetes, who meet the criteria for CGM as described by NICE.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Health for an update on the Mental Trauma Service.
(AQW 2545/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In 2015, my predecessor allocated £175,000 towards start-up costs for the service. I allocated a further £180,000 in June Monitoring this year, to allow service development to continue.

The service is based on the internationally recognised Psychological Therapies Stepped Care model, and will range from low-to-moderate intensity treatment provided by the voluntary and community sector, to high intensity treatment provided within the Health and Social Care system.

Thirteen staff from several disciplines in all Trust areas have been selected to start a Masters course in Trauma at Queen's University, and this marks the first tangible step towards strengthening the expertise required to implement the service.

Issues remain to be settled in relation to finance, recruitment and partnership working. Approximately £3.2m will be required on an annual basis, once the service is fully established, for the specialist Health and Social Care service. This would allow for the recruitment of 46 new whole time equivalent specialist staff, together with a research budget, to allow learning from the service to be shared internationally. A recurrent allocation for this element has yet to be identified. A PEACE IV application for funding for the voluntary and community elements of the service is being overseen by the Executive Office.

My Department and the Executive Office are leading on the drafting of a Partnership Agreement, which would be the governing document for the service. It is expected to be finalised by the end of 2016, and will outline the roles of the voluntary and community sector, Victims and Survivors Service and the Health and Social Care service; provide for the management of linkages and boundaries between the voluntary and community and statutory sectors; outline the funding, governance and management structures; outline the framework for assessment of service users, and movement within and between steps; and outline the expected outcomes of research conducted under the auspices of the service.

An implementation team, chaired by Dr Ciaran Mulholland, senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at Queen's University and Consultant Psychiatrist with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, has been established. The team, which will be supported by an expert advisory panel drawn from leading academics and clinicians based in Britain and the South of Ireland, will ensure that development and implementation of the service reflect clinical evidence and best practice.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health how many incidents occurred in mental health units involving inpatients who (i) self-harmed; (ii) attempted suicide, and (iii) completed suicide, or presumed as suicide where an inquest is pending, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust, in each of the last three years.
(AQW 2563/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health to detail the number of chimney fires attended by the Fire and Rescue Service in each of the last three years, broken down by (i) constituency; and (ii) council area; and what work is being undertaken to advise the public of the causes and risks of such fires.
(AQW 2571/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The table below details the number of chimney fires attended by NIFRS, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by constituency. (Calls are determined by Station turnout boundaries which are best fit with existing Constituency boundaries).

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Chimney Fires Attended		
	2013	2014	2015
Belfast East	8	7	7
Belfast North	11	9	11
Belfast South	12	10	9
Belfast West	4	8	10
East Antrim	71	44	47
East Derry	145	107	73
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	213	153	132
Foyle	180	132	106
Lagan Valley	95	67	56

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of Chimney Fires Attended		
	2013	2014	2015
Mid Ulster	100	75	65
Newry And Armagh	97	83	61
North Antrim	211	157	115
North Down	59	42	46
South Antrim	97	57	62
South Down	101	89	78
Strangford	81	63	34
Upper Bann	97	92	65
West Tyrone	168	122	116
Total Calls by Parliamentary Constituency	1750	1317	1093

- (ii) The table below details the number of chimney fires attended by NIFRS, in each of the last 3 years, broken down by Council Area.

Council Areas	Number of Chimney Fires Attended		
	2013	2014	2015
Causeway Coast & Glens	272	198	138
Mid & East Antrim	153	109	96
Antrim & Newtownabbey	102	59	66
Belfast	32	31	33
Lisburn & Castlereagh	94	71	48
North Down & Ards	117	91	73
Newry Mourne & Down	164	137	99
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	157	139	121
Mid Ulster	139	102	91
Fermanagh & Omagh	284	201	183
Derry & Strabane	236	179	145
Total Calls by Council Area	1750	1317	1093

- (iii) NIFRS provides advice on chimney fires as follows:

- At every chimney fire incident attended detailed advice is provided to the occupier on chimney fire prevention;
- At every Home Fire Safety Check delivered, where the premises have an open fire, detailed advice is provided to the occupier;
- Annually NIFRS has a campaign specifically on preventing chimney fires for Chimney Fire Week. The most recent campaign ran from Monday, 5th to Friday, 9th September 2016;
- NIFRS website provides detailed information to prevent chimney fires; and
- NIFRS safety literature provides general safety advice on chimney fires.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many staff have part of their car lease agreements paid for by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2577/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no staff who have part of their car lease agreements paid for by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

All of the Trust's employees that use the car leasing scheme have leased vehicles that are not owned by the Trust.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health how many cars for employees are owned by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 2578/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no staff who have part of their car lease agreements paid for by the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust.

All of the Trust's employees that use the car leasing scheme have leased vehicles that are not owned by the Trust.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health what early intervention treatments are available for children's mental health.

(AQW 2581/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are delivered under a Stepped Care model with a focus on early intervention. The stepped care approach is patient-focused and aims to deliver the appropriate level of care at the earliest point that best meets the assessed needs of the child or young person.

All children and young people referred to CAMHS receive a comprehensive assessment followed by an intervention programme which is tailored to meet their particular needs. Early intervention treatments are tailored to meet the assessed mental health needs of each child and adolescent, and can include direct work with the child/young person, or a systemic approach involving all family members, whilst ensuring appropriate links with other professional networks such as social services, education and the community/voluntary sector.

My officials are working with the Department of Education to consider enhancements to early intervention in schools as part of preparatory work on the Improving Mental Health indicator in the draft Programme for Government framework.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health whether she will conduct a review in conjunction with the Minister of Justice to ascertain the number of children and young people subject to social services intervention and that become involved in the judicial system, to establish (i) whether prevention and determent is possible; (ii) whether adequate safeguarding is in place to address risks connected to criminality; and (iii) whether stringent safeguards can be developed in line with risk assessments, health and safety and child protection policies and procedures.

(AQW 2635/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The Family Support and Looked After Children Strategies currently under development will have greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention and improved outcomes for children in and after care.

The aim is to reduce the number of children entering care in the first instance by intervening earlier and providing more effective edge of care services. A further aim is to secure improved outcomes for children and young people in care in key areas of their lives, including physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and educational attainment.

- (ii) and (iii) Additionally, to keep looked after children safe and less likely to engage with negative influences or in criminal activity, my officials will continue to work with Department of Justice officials in a number of areas including the Scoping Study on Children in the Justice System. The Study's proposal to place the youth justice system within a welfare and social services model, rather than a criminal justice model, is of particular relevance to my department.

Also, the planned review of Lakewood Regional Secure Care Facility led by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) will consider the interface between Lakewood and other regional children's specialist provision, including the Juvenile Justice Centre.

In view of the work I have outlined, I am content that no additional review is required.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, in relation to inpatients in mental health facilities that behave in a violent manner, (i) what is the criteria used to determine if an incident requires PSNI involvement; and (ii) whether the patient's status of admission is taken into consideration when making this decision.

(AQW 2636/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) Requests for PSNI assistance to mental health in-patient facilities are determined by whether or not there is a risk, or a potential risk, to patients, staff or public safety, and/or whether there is the potential for a crime being committed.
- (ii) The legal status or status of admission of a patient is not a determining factor in making a decision to request police assistance.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health to detail the waiting times for a respiratory clinic appointment in each the last three years.

(AQW 2639/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of people waiting, in weeks, for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment at a respiratory clinic at 30th June, in each of the last three years, is shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Weeks waiting							Total
	0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15-18	>18-52	>52	
June 14	1,436	558	409	373	223	256	3	3,258
June 15	1,398	433	440	353	355	1,421	7	4,407
June 16	1,453	582	552	380	428	2,409	83	5,887

Source: HSC Trusts

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health to detail the waiting times for gastroenterology in each the last three years.
(AQW 2640/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on waiting times for a first consultant-led outpatient appointment in the gastroenterology specialty at 30th June, in each of the last three years, is shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-9	>9-12	>12-15	>15-18	>18	
June 2014	2,010	661	458	516	452	2,212	6,309
June 2015	1,923	643	549	523	588	5,724	9,950
June 2016	1,657	563	506	367	421	3,888	7,402

Source: CH3 Return

Information on waiting times for inpatient and day case treatment in the gastroenterology specialty at 30th June, in each of the last three years, is shown in the table below.

Quarter Ending	Weeks Waiting						Total Waiting
	0-6	>6-13	>13-21	>21-26	>26-52	>52	
June 2014	1,727	761	85	4	0	0	2,577
June 2015	1,677	1,328	870	179	78	0	4,132
June 2016	1,555	1,342	1,502	291	351	115	5,156

Source: DoH Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Please note, this information is routinely published on the Department of Health website and is available at the following link;
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/dhssps-statistics-and-research/hospital-waiting-times-statistics>

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health what work has been undertaken by her Department to make the Orkambi drug generally available to people diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis.
(AQW 2646/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence) published guidance on the use of Lumacaftor and ivacaftor (Orkambi) combination therapy for treating cystic fibrosis homozygous for the F508del mutation. This guidance (TA398) does not recommend the use of Lumacaftor and ivacaftor for treating cystic fibrosis.

The Department endorsed TA398 as applicable in the north of Ireland in August 2016 and Lumacaftor and ivacaftor (Orkambi) would not therefore be offered as a routinely commissioned drug for CF.

For therapies not routinely commissioned in the north of Ireland the HSC Board considers funding requests for treatment where exceptional clinical circumstances can be established. These are known as individual funding requests (IFRs). Requests are submitted by clinicians and supported by nominated senior clinicians and managers within the Health and Social Care Trusts.

The details of the process can be found at the following link:
http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/Protocol_ECR_and_IFR_arrangements.pdf

Mr Chambers asked the Minister of Health to detail the availability of Adcetris for people diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma.
(AQW 2649/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: NICE has recently issued draft guidance for consultation which does not recommend brentuximab vedotin (Adcetris) for treating CD30-positive Hodgkin's lymphoma in adults.

Consultation on the draft guidance closed on Thursday 1 September 2016. Comments received during this consultation will be considered by the committee at a further appraisal meeting before the next draft guidance is issued. NICE anticipates that the final guidance will be issued in January 2017.

When the final guidance is issued, my Department will consider it under the usual process for NICE technology appraisals as per the guidance set out in circular HSC (SQSD) 2/13 which can be found at the link at: <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dhssps/hsc-sqsd-2-13.pdf>

In circumstances where NICE has not made any recommendations on the use of a drug the HSC Board considers funding requests for treatment where exceptional clinical circumstances can be established. These are known as individual funding requests (IFRs). Requests are submitted by clinicians and supported by nominated senior clinicians and managers within the Health and Social Care Trusts.

The HSC Board may also choose, in those cases where NICE has not yet issued guidance on a drug which has however been approved by the Scottish Medicines Consortium, to make it available to patients here on a cost per case basis pending any recommendation from NICE. Where NICE guidance subsequently does not recommend the use of a drug it is not routinely commissioned by the HSC Board. In some cases, brentuximab vedotin has been commissioned for individual patients and regardless of the final decision by NICE they will have the option to continue their treatment until they and their clinician consider it appropriate to stop.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health to outline what steps her Department has taken to ensure that airports can facilitate the security checks required to allow young children fitted with pace makers to progress safely through security.
(AQW 2654/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Individual Airports are responsible for implementing security measures to meet aviation security regulations set by the Secretary of State for Transport and for providing the necessary advice to travellers to ensure that they can travel safely through these security checks. Advice to travellers fitted with pacemakers, including young children, is available from the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency, Device Manufacturers and the British Heart Foundation.

Mr Poots asked the Minister of Health when she will launch the ovarian cancer campaign.
(AQW 2661/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Public Health Agency is delivering a 'Be Cancer Aware' campaign to improve the public's awareness of signs and symptoms of cancer. As part of this campaign, the Agency launched an ovarian cancer awareness programme in September 2014 in partnership with Target Ovarian Cancer and Angels of Hope, a local charity. This entailed the widespread distribution of leaflets and posters to highlight the signs and symptoms of the illness.

The Agency has also developed a website at www.becancerawareni.info which: provides information about signs and symptoms of a range of cancers, including ovarian cancer; explains what people can do if concerned; and signposts to recommended sources of support.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health how much has been paid to provide out-of-hours services over the last five years.
(AQW 2667/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Investment in General Practice 2011/12 to 2015/16 report, published by NHS Digital on 21 September 2016, provides information on investment in General Practice in England, Scotland, Wales and NI.

The report, which draws on information obtained from country level financial monitoring reports, can be accessed via the NHS Digital website at: <http://www.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21317/inve-gene-prac-eng-wal-ni-scot-11-16-rep.pdf>

The report includes information on investment in GP out of hours services in the north of Ireland over the last five years, as set out in the table below.

Year	GP Out of Hours Funding £000s
2011/12	20,825
2012/13	21,579
2013/14	20,716
2014/15	23,014
2015/16	24,475

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health how many GP surgeries have closed in the last five years.
(AQW 2668/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: One GP surgery has closed within the last five years; this closure was in 2013. A number of surgeries have merged over the last five years, which have had more of an impact than closures on total number of GP surgeries, which totalled 347 in 2016, compared to 353 in 2012.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health how many GPs have advised of their intention to retire in 2016.
(AQW 2669/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: GPs are independent contractors who contract with the Health and Social Care Board to provide general medical services to their patients. I am aware that 40 GPs have advised the Board of their intention to retire in 2016.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health how much funding has been provided for General Practice in each of the last five financial years.
(AQW 2670/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Investment in General Practice 2011/12 to 2015/16 report was published by NHS Digital on 21 September 2016 and provides information on investment in General Practice in England, Scotland, Wales and the north of Ireland.

The report, which draws on information obtained from country level financial monitoring reports, can be accessed via the NHS digital website at: <http://www.digital.nhs.uk/catalogue/PUB21317/inve-gene-prac-eng-wal-ni-scot-11-16-rep.pdf>

The report shows investment in General Practice in the north of Ireland (including the reimbursement of drugs dispensed in General Practices) over the last 5 years as follows:

Year	General Practice Total Spend £000s
2011/12	236,624
2012/13	236,854
2013/14	249,929
2014/15	255,227
2015/16	266,760

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health what steps have been taken by her Department to rural proof GP provision in (i) West Tyrone; (ii) Fermanagh and South Tyrone; and (iii) Foyle.
(AQW 2671/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has made a number of investments in recent years to help address the pressures facing GPs, including those in rural areas. The number of GP training places available here each year has been increased from 65 to 85; a new scheme has been introduced to retain GPs in general practice; my Department has invested in an initiative to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs; and I have provided additional funding to help practices work together via GP Federations to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

In addition to these investments, the Health and Social Care Board continues to work closely with local GPs to ensure the provision of sustainable services in rural areas. In West Tyrone, a new partnership has been in place since April 2016 following the amalgamation of three GP practices. This new partnership has been able to attract a number of younger GPs to work as part of its team, and the full range of general medical services are available across all three sites.

In response to recent and planned retirements of GPs in the Fermanagh area, the Health and Social Care Board is working with local GPs to explore options for future service provision, with the aim of ensuring patients continue to have access to high quality care.

The majority of GP practices in the Foyle district are multi-handed practices situated in urban areas. Of the small number of rural practices in the district, none have indicated that they are experiencing or expect to experience any recruitment difficulties.

The recent review of GP-led care services made a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the pressures on the GP workforce, including rural practices. I am considering the findings of this review and am committed to developing a long-term plan to ensure that GP services across the North can continue to provide high quality care to the population on a sustainable basis.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Health (i) how many Health and Social Care board staff sit on the panel to prioritise assessments for children with suspected autistic spectrum disorders; (ii) how often this panel meets; and (iii) to list the grades of staff involved in these assessments.
(AQW 2676/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Please see below response to the requested information.

- i) Health and Social Care Board staff do not sit on assessment/triage panels.

- ii) Most assessment/triage panels meet once a week to screen and prioritise referrals.
- iii) Trusts determine the most appropriate staff to participate in the triage process. Some have introduced multi-disciplinary triage, which includes other children's development and emotional behavioural services; early intervention and CAMHS.

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health (i) to detail the number of podiatrists currently based at the Ballymena Health and Social Care centre; (ii) how many have left employment this year; (iii) how many podiatrists were originally planned for the centre; and (iv) to outline any action planned to reduce waiting times for podiatry services at this centre.

(AQW 2680/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) There are currently 8 podiatrists (4.4 whole time equivalent) and 1 podiatry assistant (0.6 whole time equivalent) based at Ballymena Health and Care Centre. There are currently 2 staff on maternity leave, resulting in a reduction of 0.4 whole time equivalent (WTE) professional podiatry staff and 0.6 WTE podiatry assistant time. Backfilling for these posts is progressed through usual Trust HR processes.

There are also 1.8 whole time equivalent Gait analysis podiatrists who work in Ballymena Health and Care Centre. These podiatrists work in the specialist Trust wide Gait analysis centre, and not core podiatry.

- (ii) No staff have terminated their employment in the past year.
- (iii) The planned staffing levels for Ballymena Health and Care Centre were 4.4 whole time equivalent podiatrists.
- (iv) Northern Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust podiatry attain a 13 week access target for new patient assessment and treatment subsequent to referral, and this is the case in Ballymena Health and Care Centre.

There may be delays at times for review appointments for patients already known to the service due to unplanned sick leave, times of significant planned annual leave (July /August) or delays in recruitment.

At times such as this, the following actions may be taken to address any backlog:

- Staff move to clinics where greatest need exists
- Staff are offered additional hours to provide clinical input to area of need (within funding envelope)
- Staff meetings are cancelled to create additional capacity
- Agency staff employed, as recruitment process can be slow
- Short term temporary posts appointed

The Northern HSC Trust aim to see patients within 2-3 weeks of contact with the service for routine review and if this is not possible, patients may be placed on a waiting list.

There are currently fewer than 20 people waiting for a review appointment in the Ballymena area.

Mr Butler asked the Minister of Health what consideration has been given to awarding service medals to members of the Fire and Rescue Service who served during the period of Operation Banner.

(AQW 2683/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: There are no plans to award service medals to members of the Fire and Rescue Service in respect of this period.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health (i) to outline what policies are in place to support women who have sought healthcare or support after an abortion; and (ii) to detail how many women have accessed healthcare or support; broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area and age per year over the last ten years.

(AQW 2778/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: In March 2016 my Department published "Guidance for Health and Social Care Professionals on Termination of Pregnancy in NI".

The guidance sets out that, regardless of where a termination of pregnancy has been carried out, where necessary, support must be provided for women through access to appropriate treatment including counselling. It is the responsibility of Health and Social Care Trusts to provide access to aftercare support for all women where it has been assessed to be required.

The statistics you request are not routinely collected by the Trusts.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health what steps she is taking to address the staff shortages experienced by the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service on Saturday 2 July 2016.

(AQW 2826/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The shortage was due to a number of factors including rostered leave, sickness, vacant shifts and cancelled overtime. Invariably this is a pressure the Ambulance Service experiences on a day to day basis. Support from voluntary and private providers is sought as required and recruitment to vacant posts is on-going.

The Trust continually monitors planned and actual hours of cover along with performance on a real time basis. The Trust also plans to review workflow levels and levels of cover through a capacity review in the Autumn of 2016.

The Department is in the early stages of developing a workforce plan for paramedic services across the HSC.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, pursuant to AQW 43502/11-15, for an update on proposals to redevelop Ravara Training and Resource Centre in Bangor, including the timeframe for delivery and budget allocation.
(AQW 2863/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Ravara redevelopment is part of a wider project to replace day care facilities in the South Eastern Trust. A business case is being prepared and has been discussed with the Trust. This is a project that certainly has merit given the existing facilities but is subject to budget constraints. The Department's Capital Budget is heavily committed and ultimately the timing of this project will be determined by business case approval and budget availability.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Health for an update on the progress of the Working Group on Fatal Foetal Abnormality; and whether the report will be completed by the end of September 2016.
(AQW 2879/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Working Group has met on three occasions over the summer, 14 July, 16 August and 8 September 2016, to consider issues in relation to cases of fatal foetal abnormality and to progress the development of draft proposals for change including, if appropriate, recommendations for legislative change.

The Group has also sought the views of women, and their partners, with experience of this issue, either through the work currently ongoing within the Public Health Agency or directly with the women themselves. They have also consulted and engaged with health professionals and representatives from the appropriate Royal Colleges and has taken account of the views expressed by many organisations during the 2015 consultation by the DOJ on this matter.

The Working Group aims to meet the commitment to report to myself and the Justice Minister by the end of September 2016.

Mr Hilditch asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of the waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery.
(AQW 2921/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The long waiting times faced by patients and their families in orthopaedics and many other specialties are completely unacceptable to me and tackling them is high on my agenda for delivering improvement in the health service. I want to get to a position where excessive waiting times will be in the past and sustainable high-quality services, underpinned by a stable budget, will be the reality and the future going forward.

The Health and Social Care Board is working with Trusts to take forward a range of initiatives to reform the way in which elective care services are delivered. Initiatives specific to orthopaedics include the appointment of additional orthopaedic consultants; expansion of the orthopaedic ICATs teams in the South Eastern, Belfast and the Northern Trusts to allow the full implementation of the new back/spinal pathway; the development of regional agreed outpatient referral guidance using the British Orthopaedic Association Clinical Commissioning Guidelines for hip, knee, shoulder, elbow, hand, ankle & feet, paediatric and spinal conditions; continued rollout of E-triage to support medically led triage for orthopaedic referrals; and increased investment in the Regional Orthopaedic Spinal Service to help reduce the waiting times for spinal surgery.

My Department is working closely with the Health and Social Care Board in developing an elective care plan to arrest the decline in elective waiting times and deliver sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialties.

As well as maximising the number of patients who can be treated in the community, the plan will ensure that existing funded capacity in the health service is fully maximised and targets new recurrent investment to expand the health service's capacity to meet patient demand. However, it will require significant additional funding to deliver this. I will continue to engage with my Executive colleagues to secure the additional investment necessary to transform the delivery of services.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health for his assessment of the fitness for use of the Ravara Training and Resource Centre.
(AQW 2965/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: This property asset is owned by the South Eastern HSC Trust (the Trust) who has confirmed that the building is in use and being maintained to high standards to ensure that the service is delivered efficiently and safely.

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health when she will publish the Bengoa Report into the future of the Health and Social Care system.
(AQO 225/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The reconfiguration of Health and Social Care (HSC) in the North is an important and complex matter. I am therefore taking time to consider fully the implications of the recommendations made throughout the report. Alongside the Panel's report I will publish my vision piece shortly. Through this I aim to act early to translate the political and public discussions about HSC reform into concrete proposals for transformation and improvement.

I want to make sure that those who deliver and receive services understand and can influence the new model of care and I will ensure there is real and meaningful engagement with service users and HSC staff throughout the transformation process.

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health how many admissions to Emergency Departments in 2014/15 and 2015/16 were linked to domestic violence.

(AQO 226/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Information on the number of attendances at emergency care departments as a result of domestic violence is not available. It is, therefore, not currently possible to provide regionally consistent information on the reason for attendance.

There are many perceived barriers to disclosing domestic violence. Some victims, while wanting the abuse to cease, may still have an emotional or financial dependency on the perpetrator. Indeed, when presenting to front line services victims may often be accompanied by the perpetrator, subject to coercion and control. Others may see some form of stigma associated with the disclosure of domestic violence; may fear losing their children to social services; or there may even be perceived cultural or religious barriers. These known barriers make it more difficult for Health services to fully engage with victims who may fervently deny any abuse has taken place.

However, I do not believe that this negates clinicians and health professionals from their commitment to providing help and support and encouraging disclosure. I recognise the potential benefits of utilising health services such as Emergency Departments, Maternity and General Practitioners in supporting people to disclose domestic violence.

As part of this, my Department will continue to seek to identify all opportunities within front line services to protect victims of domestic and sexual violence as it implements the new Stopping Domestic and Sexual Violence and Abuse Strategy.

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health for an update on the recruitment of community paediatricians by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust in order to reduce waiting lists for pre-school assessments at the Trust's Child Development Clinic.

(AQO 227/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Belfast Trust has experienced difficulty in the past in recruiting community paediatricians. The Trust is actively seeking to fill two current vacancies, a Speciality Doctor and Consultant Paediatrician. The current recruitment process underway has yielded applications for the Specialty Doctor in Community Paediatrics post and interviews will take place in September 2016. In addition, a recruitment exercise is underway to recruit a Community and General Consultant Paediatrician. The closing date for applications for this post is 13 September 2016. The filling of these posts will contribute to the reduction of waiting list for pre-school assessments at the Trusts Child Development Clinic.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister of Health what action her Department has taken to improve the GP out-of-hours service provided by Western Urgent Care in the Western Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQO 228/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has provided significant additional investment over recent years to address the pressures facing GP out of hours services across the North.

In 2016/17, in addition to core funding of almost £4.8 million for its out of hours services, funding of £196,000 will be available for Western Urgent Care to provide extra clinical capacity where it is needed most and additional bank holiday clinical capacity. £30,000 will be available to provide training for staff working in the service.

Up to £284,000 is available to fund a Localised Additional Costs Scheme to support and incentivise GPs to work additional hours, fill shifts and cover additional costs such as medical indemnity, and £46,000 is available to help build the skills mix of professionals working in the out of hours service.

I can also advise that funding of £100,000 for a Local Enhanced Service will continue in the Western Trust area in 2016/17. Under this arrangement GP principals provide additional clinical time (via booked appointments) for a 2½ hour period for five evenings during the week. This service has been put in place in the Altnagelvin base as Western Urgent Care have identified this base as having the highest demand in the Western area.

Despite the pressures facing the out of hours service within the Trust area, in 2015, 92% of urgent calls to Western Urgent Care were triaged within 20 minutes, and 81% of routine calls were triaged within one hour.

My Department and the Health and Social Care Board continue to work closely with out of hours providers across the North to address the challenges facing the service. The report of the Departmental-led working group set up to review the pressures facing GP-services also incorporated recommendations from a review of GP out of hours services. I am carefully considering the findings of that review and am committed to ensuring that everyone in the North has access to high quality, sustainable GP services both in hours and out of hours.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health for her assessment of whether the tender documents for an aviation service provider issued by Air Ambulance NI were fit for purpose.

(AQO 229/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The purpose of the recent Europe-wide tender process undertaken by AANI was to identify an aviation service provider with appropriate experience in providing HEMS services. Members will have noted the charity's recent appointment

of Babcock Mission Critical Services to fulfil this important role. This marks another welcome step towards introducing this service.

The Business Service Organisation's Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS), which acts as the Centre of Procurement Expertise for all HSC bodies, provided guidance to the charity to ensure that the competition adhered to public procurement rules, and provided my Department with the necessary assurances in this regard.

The charity also benefitted from the advice and vast experience of the Association of Air Ambulances ('Triple A') throughout this process.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Health whether her Department has a strategy to encourage breastfeeding.
(AQO 230/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department's Breastfeeding – A Great Start: A Strategy for Northern Ireland 2013-2023 aims to improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies through breastfeeding. The Strategy contains a number of actions to encourage breastfeeding, for example, the production of resources to raise awareness of the importance of breastfeeding; improved training for health professionals; and initiatives to support breastfeeding mothers in their community.

Mr Ford asked the Minister of Health what funds have been allocated for capital investment, running costs and staffing arrangements for the helicopter emergency medical service.
(AQO 231/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has made £250k revenue funding available to the Ambulance Service in the current year. Initially this will be used to fund a HEMS coordinator and clinical lead, and also for the recruitment and training costs for the clinical personnel on board the aircraft. I have also made £1m in capital funding available this year for necessary enablement works and purchase of medical equipment.

This funding and the ongoing costs of operating the service are subject to approval of a business case for the HEMS revenue and capital costs, which is currently being finalised by the Ambulance Service. I expect this to be submitted to my Department at the end of this month.

Members will also be aware of the charity AANI's recent success in securing up to £4.5m from the Chancellor's banking fines fund earlier this year, to help establish and operate the HEMS in its initial years.

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health for an update on the future of Bangor Hospital.
(AQO 232/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Bangor Community Hospital provides a range of health, social and primary care services including outpatient clinics, Allied Healthcare Professionals' services and a Minor Injuries Unit.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust's proposals for intermediate care in the North Down and Ards area, including the future of the Bangor Hospital GP Ward, are currently with my Department for detailed consideration. No final decisions have yet been taken.

Mr Murphy asked the Minister of Health, in light of plans to remove nursing bursaries in England, whether she plans to maintain this funding for local student nurses.
(AQO 233/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The UK Chancellor's announcement, in his 2015 Autumn Statement, of the intention to replace NHS bursaries with student loans does not apply in the north of Ireland. I have no plans to withdraw bursary support for student nurses here.

Mr O'Dowd asked the Minister of Health, in light of the pressures faced by GPs in rural areas, how she plans to support General Practice in the provision of primary care in the community.
(AQO 234/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: A number of investments have been made in recent years to help address the pressures facing GPs. The number of GP training places has been increased from 65 per year to 85, the biggest increase in more than ten years, and we have put in place a new scheme to retain GPs in general practice.

In addition we are investing up to [£14m] by 2020/21 to put almost 300 pharmacists into practices to see patients, improve care and ease the workload on GPs.

And 2016/17 has seen more than £7m invested in GP services, as well as up to £10m made available in financial transactions capital for improving premises.

Furthermore, I recently announced an additional [£900k] to support the work of GP Federations. GP Federations will help practices work together to increase their resilience and meet rising demand.

All of these investments will help to address the pressures facing GPs in rural areas – and I know that officers from the Health and Social Care Board are working closely with practices in more rural areas who face particular challenges.

The recent review of GP-led care services made a number of recommendations aimed at addressing the pressures on the GP workforce, including rural practices. I am carefully considering the findings of the GP-led care review and am committed to working with GP colleagues to ensure everyone here has access to sustainable, high quality GP services.

Mr T Buchanan asked the Minister of Health how she plans to reduce waiting lists for orthopaedic surgery.
(AQO 235/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: The Health and Social Care Board is working with Trusts to take forward a range of initiatives to reform the way in which outpatient services are delivered. Initiatives specific to orthopaedics include:

- Waiting list validation of all patients waiting over 9 months;
- Increasing orthopaedic Integrated Clinical Assessment and Treatment Services (ICATS) capacity to ensure all routine back/spinal referrals are assessed initially by an ICATs practitioner;
- Developing regional outpatient referral guidance using the British Orthopaedic Association Clinical Commissioning guideline with the Clinical Communication Gateway system;
- Increasing the roll-out and uptake of E-triage which will reduce the demand for new outpatient slots;
- Exploring the referrals for advice option for a range of subspecialties.

My Department is working closely with the Health and Social Care Board in developing an elective care plan to arrest the decline in elective waiting times and deliver sustainable improvements in the medium to longer term across all specialties.

As well as maximising the number of patients who can be treated in the community, the plan will ensure that existing funded capacity in the health service is fully maximised and targets new recurrent investment to expand the health service's capacity to meet patient demand. However, it will require significant additional funding to deliver this. I will continue to engage with my Executive colleagues to secure the additional investment necessary to transform the delivery of services.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health whether she will consider instigating a system to formally record positive patient feedback across the Health and Social Care sector.
(AQW 3163/16-21)

Mrs O'Neill: Gathering information on health care experience both positive and negative is a priority for me and is a draft PFG indicator.

My department are preparing options to take forward this work as a priority.

Department for Infrastructure

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for her assessment of her Department's retrospective Environmental Impact Assessment screening in the absence of a mining waste management plan under the NI Regulations 2010.
(AQW 1238/16-21)

Mr Hazzard (The Minister for Infrastructure): The Woodburn Permitted Development Notification to drill an exploratory well under Permitted Development Rights was assessed under Part 16 of the Planning (General Development) Order (NI) 1993.

The exploratory drilling operations fell within the threshold listed in Schedule 2, Column 1(2)(d) of the Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2012 and therefore the proposals required an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Determination to be carried out under the same regulations.

An Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) screening determination was undertaken by the Department for the exploratory drilling proposed at Woodburn Forest, Carrickfergus. This was not retrospective as officials completed the EIA determination prior to confirming permitted development rights for the project in December 2013.

At the time of the EIA assessment it was not considered that the operations to be undertaken at Woodburn fell within the scope of the Planning (Management of Waste from Extractive Industries) Regulations (NI) 2010.

Having reviewed this position, in July 2014 the Department of the Environment requested the submission of a waste management plan for the site. This information was submitted in March 2015 and subsequently assessed by the Mid and East Antrim Borough Council before the development was commenced.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding for weed spraying in 2015/16, broken down by Borough Council area.
(AQW 2328/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however I can provide the member with information on Routine Maintenance expenditure by District Council area (see table below). Weed spraying is one of the sub functions that make up the Routine Maintenance of the road network.

Other functions within Routine Maintenance are Embankments & Cuttings and Verges, Grass Cutting & Environmental Work, Fences and Sweeping, Cleaning and Gully Emptying

District Council Area	2015-16 £k
Belfast City Council	1,662
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	1,076
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	751
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	1,566
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	1,693
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	1,675
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	1,223
Ards & North Down Borough Council	637
Derry City & Strabane District Council	1,159
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	1,642
Mid Ulster District Council	1,232
Total Routine Maintenance Spend	14,316

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding for footpath resurfacing in 2015/16, broken down by Borough Council area.

(AQW 2329/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however I can provide the member with information on Capital Structural Maintenance expenditure by District Council area (see table below). Footpath resurfacing is one of the sub functions that make up the Capital Structural Maintenance of the road network.

Other functions within Capital Structural Maintenance are Carriageway Resurfacing, Surface Dressing, Structural Drainage and Structural Stability.

District Council Area	2015-16 £k
Belfast City Council	2,523
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	2,564
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	3,091
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	2,592
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	3,900
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	5,207
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	4,659
Ards & North Down Borough Council	2,128
Derry City & Strabane District Council	3,432
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	5,462
Mid Ulster District Council	4,858
Total Structural Maintenance Spend	40,416

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the funding for road resurfacing in 2015/16, broken down by Borough Council area.

(AQW 2330/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not maintain a record of expenditure in the format requested, however I can provide the member with information on Capital Structural Maintenance expenditure by District Council area (see table below). Carriageway Resurfacing is one of the sub functions that make up the Structural Maintenance of the road network.

Other functions within Capital Structural Maintenance are Footway Resurfacing, Surface Dressing, Structural Drainage and Structural Stability.

District Council Area	2015-16 £k
Belfast City Council	2,523
Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council	2,564
Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council	3,091
Mid & East Antrim Borough Council	2,592
Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council	3,900
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council	5,207
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	4,659
Ards & North Down Borough Council	2,128
Derry City & Strabane District Council	3,432
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	5,462
Mid Ulster District Council	4,858
Total Capital Structural Maintenance Spend	40,416

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure when traffic calming measures will be installed on Breda Road, Newtownbreda. (AQW 2331/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI receives numerous requests for traffic calming measures and therefore my officials need to assess each area as objectively as possible to allow us to make decisions on a basis of need and resource.

Following your request they have updated a previous assessment along Breda Road for the provision of traffic calming measures. This took account of various factors including; the likely speed and volume of traffic; the most recent previous 3 year personal injury collision statistics available to us; environmental factors such as the presence of schools, playgrounds, hospitals, clinics, shops, public buildings; and if this area is used as a through route.

The assessment indicates that Breda Road is currently placed 309th on the list of sites that have been assessed for traffic calming measures within the TransportNI Eastern Division area. Given the number of other areas competing for inclusion within the Traffic Calming Programme that are deemed to be a greater priority, officials do not envisage being able to provide traffic calming measures on Breda Road for the foreseeable future.

The prioritization of work within any particular area is never easy but I can assure you that my officials do attempt to do this in a fair and equitable manner, concentrating their limited available finance to those most deserving areas where the need is greatest.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether the red water gates on Melough Road will be preserved. (AQW 2332/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The land on Mealough Road has been sold to a consortium of developers. The red gateposts, which are made of cast iron and are very fragile, will be removed by a contractor working for the developers in the near future. It may be extremely difficult to remove the gates in one piece; however if they can be retained they will be returned to NI Water and put in storage for preservation.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the proposed housing developments on the Saintfield Road, to outline when the sewage, drainage and traffic systems will be updated to deal with the increased capacity. (AQW 2333/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are presently two major housing developments planned along the Saintfield Road, these are Baronsgrange (377 dwellings) and Mealough Lands (350 dwellings).

My Department is a statutory consultee to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council planning authority, providing specialist advice on transportation and roads related matters associated with proposed developments.

As part of the planning process, developers were required to undertake a Transport Assessment (TA) to identify potential transport impacts of both these developments and agree appropriate mitigation measures. The TA provides both the planning authority and my Department with a good understanding of how the transport aspects of the development will function and in particular how the development will impact on the adjacent road network.

Baronsgrange

The Transport Assessment for Baronsgrange has recommended that the junction of Comber Road/Church Road/Saintfield Road should be improved. It also recommended that only buses could enter the development directly from the Saintfield Road and this would be controlled by a bus gate. Other vehicular traffic would enter and exit the site from the Comber Road.

Mealough Lands

The Transport Assessments, submitted as part of the three full planning applications for the Mealough Lands, proposes improvements to both the Mealough Road and the Mealough Road/Saintfield Road junction, as well as improvements to the Knockbracken Road/Saintfield Road junction.

It should be noted the developers of both developments will be directly responsible for implementing the road and traffic improvements associated with each. The timescale for undertaking improvement works to the Saintfield Road is dependent upon the residential developments receiving planning permission and the progress of each development.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed construction of four grade-separated junctions on the A1 between Dromore and Banbridge.

(AQW 2348/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A significant amount of development work has already been carried out for the proposed A1 Junctions Phase 2 Road Improvement Scheme which includes the construction of four compact grade separated junctions; however, much remains to be done.

The current phase of this work involves the completion of the detailed design and Environmental Statement in preparation for taking the proposal through the Statutory Procedures, which will likely include a Public Inquiry.

Progression to construction remains subject to the proposal clearing the statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal and, given other competing priorities, is dependent on funding being made available in future budget settlements.

In advance of the full proposal incremental improvements involving erecting sections of central median safety barrier and where possible, closing up existing median gaps which facilitate right turn manoeuvres, will also be implemented. The first such improvement involves the closure of the median at Hillsborough to prevent the right turn movement for southbound traffic into Moira Road and the erection of a central safety barrier between Hillsborough Roundabout and the flyover type junction at Dromore Road, Hillsborough.

It is proposed carry out these works within the current financial year, subject to the clearing the relevant statutory procedure.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed reconfiguration of the Rathfriland Road Junction of the A1 at Banbridge

(AQW 2349/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A full grade separated junction was constructed during 2003/4 where the B10 Rathfriland Road crossed the A1 Dual Carriageway. There are no plans for a reconfiguration of this junction at this time.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed free-flow M1-A1 motorway link at Sprucefield.

(AQW 2350/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has a long term proposal to provide a new road link between the A1 and the M1 motorway, bypassing Sprucefield. This link would benefit strategic traffic by avoiding delays in the Sprucefield area. The proposed scheme is at a preliminary stage of development which has identified two possible route options but further options will need to be examined.

Currently there is insufficient funding to continue with the development of this scheme and its progression will be dependent on the availability of finance through future budgetary settlements.

On a more general note my Department is progressing the development of new Transport Plans in line with The New Approach to Regional Transportation, and this will set out a long-term programme of investment. Development of these plans will provide an opportunity for all strategic roads projects across the north, including an upgrade to the M1/A1 link, to be considered for funding.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2130/16-21, to detail (i) the reasons for a flight delay which does not constitute an 'exceptional circumstance'; (ii) any instances where a delayed flight was not an 'exceptional circumstance'; (iii) any instances where a breach of this 'exceptional circumstance' qualification occurred; and (iv) any enforcement the planning service have taken on the 'exceptional circumstance' requirement.

(AQW 2355/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department has not defined "exceptional circumstances" and considers it is a matter of judgement in the context of the obligation in the Planning Agreement. Each explanation provided for late flights by the Airport is considered on its own merits.

There have been no instances to date where a delayed flight was not considered an "exceptional circumstance". No enforcement action has been taken to date against the Airport regarding delayed flights. The Department continues to monitor levels and explanations for late flights.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure what consideration has been given to the introduction of self-driving buses.
(AQW 2356/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Current driverless bus technologies remain at an early stage of development and I can confirm that Translink are continuing to monitor this technology.

As part of Translink's Bus and Coach Fleet Strategy, new and innovative technologies are monitored with a view to future deployment, where appropriate. This includes driverless technology, new vehicle types and environmentally friendly propulsion systems.

Ms Mallon asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how much was spent on provision or upgrade of the footpath from Ballymena to Cullybackey over the last five years; (ii) the lengths and costs associated with each phase; and (iii) all costs associated with the final element across the railway line.

(AQW 2363/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) how much was spent on provision or upgrade of the footpath from Ballymena to Cullybackey over the last five years - £286,006
- (ii) the lengths and costs associated with each phase –
 - Financial year 2012/13; 707m; £161,092
 - Financial year 2014/15; 202m; £124,914
- (iii) all costs associated with the final element across the railway line: **£74,814**
(Translink relocated the barrier machine and road traffic lights together with some minor civil works).

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) his Road Maintenance budget for 2016/17; and (ii) how it will be spent.

(AQW 2368/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The TransportNI maintenance budget comprises both Capital and Resource funding.

Capital funding is used to deliver the majority of the structural maintenance programme including resurfacing, surface dressing and structural drainage.

Resource funding is used to deliver the patching element of structural maintenance as well as routine maintenance activities such as grass cutting, gully emptying, road markings and winter service.

The Department recently allocated an additional £5m for essential road maintenance activities, including the repair of potholes and a further £10m capital allocation for rural roads improvements through the Rural Roads Initiative.

The Rural Roads Initiative will target sections of the network in greatest need of repair, with the £10 million funding targeted at the areas of greatest need right across the four TransportNI Divisions and will deliver up to 1000 small scale resurfacing schemes.

The current structural maintenance projected outturn, that is both capital and resource, is estimated at £66 million, with approx breakdown as follows:

■ Resurfacing	£37m
■ Surface Dressing	£12.5m
■ Structural Drainage	£5m
■ Structural Stability	£1m
■ Patching	£10.5m
■ Total	£66m

TransportNI allocates funding to its four Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions also use a range of indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department is considering upgrading safety provisions on Agivey Road.

(AQW 2381/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's TransportNI is currently developing a scheme proposal to improve a section of the A54 Agivey Road between its junction with Mullan Road and Movanager Road, a length of approximately 750m.

The aim of the scheme is to upgrade the standard of the road through improved vertical alignment, increasing the forward sight distances, providing verges and extending the footway over the length of the scheme.

Progression of this scheme through to construction will be subject to the availability of funding. However, in the current economic climate where funding for minor works schemes of this nature is very limited I am unable to give an indication as to when it will be taken forward.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will be conducting a regional review into coastal erosion.

(AQW 2382/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department and the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs are working together on the issue of coastal management, and I recently met with the DAERA Minister to discuss how a more strategic approach might be taken in relation to this issue. We have agreed that the Coastal Forum which Minister McIlveen established in her capacity as the former Minister for Regional Development should be reinstated to enable a broader overview of work relating to coastal management. We have also agreed to consider how best a scientific evidence base can be provided to inform decision making.

My Department does not currently have the resource to carry out a comprehensive regional review into coastal erosion, and indeed the current responsibility of my Department extends only to the protection of the roads and railway networks as well as designated sea defences, all of which only accounts for some 20% of the coastline. However, my officials have recently carried out some limited survey work in areas of the coastline where roads are deemed to be potentially threatened. The survey work will allow programmes of repair to be drawn up and prioritised if funding is available. I also understand that some Councils are bidding for funding to carry out some of the Baseline survey work which will potentially feed into any regional review.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department would consider allowing the use of loading bays in town centres as additional parking spaces during certain periods of the day in order to increase the number of parking spaces available to the public.

(AQW 2384/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Loading bays can operate either all day or for a specific time period. Where the bay operates for a specific time period only, this will be indicated on the adjacent traffic signs, and if no other form of restriction is indicated, the bay is available for parking outside the stated times. Where no time periods are shown, the loading bay operates all day and can only be used for loading/unloading purposes.

The provision of loading bays is largely dependent on local need. My Department generally only provides a dedicated loading bay where there is a regular and frequent demand for kerb side space for servicing adjacent commercial premises, and where there is little or no alternative space to allow loading and unloading. The periods of operation are set using local data from a number of sources including traffic surveys or consultations with local businesses and the police.

The provision and operative periods of each loading bay is considered on its individual merits. I suggest that, if you feel that there is a need to change the times of operation of a specific bay, you should contact the local TransportNI divisional office.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has any plans to devolve on-street parking responsibility to local District Councils.

(AQW 2385/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has currently no plans to devolve on-street parking responsibility to local District Councils.

However my Department will continue to work closely with the Councils on parking issues, including the preparation of parking strategies.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department will work with the local District Councils to review the current on-street parking and waiting restrictions in order to achieve a joined-up parking strategy for town centres.

(AQW 2386/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the reform of public administration and the planning system, Councils are now responsible for off-street parking and for preparing Local Development Plans. As part of the Local Development Plan, an overall car parking strategy will be needed to ensure adequate provision for car parking whilst recognising the role of car parking in influencing modal choice and the use of sustainable transport.

My Department remains the transport authority and retains responsibility for on-street parking. My Department will work closely with the Councils in preparing local transport strategies and plans to complement the Local Development Plans. The local transport strategy will include a car parking strategy.

In the meantime my Department will continue to work with relevant stakeholders to introduce traffic management schemes aimed at ensuring the safe and efficient use of the local road network.

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many planning applications for wind farms have been approved from April 2011 to September 2016.

(AQW 2395/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see the tables below which provide the information requested. Table 1 outlines approvals of wind farms and wind turbines from May 2007 to end of March 2011. Table 2 provides details of wind farms and wind turbines approved between April 2011 to the end of March 2016, as this is the latest official statistics published by the Department.

1: Approvals May 2007 to end of March 2011

RenewableType	May-07 to end Mar-08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Single Wind Turbine	131	224	102	118	575
Wind Farm	11	10	14	12	47
Grand Total	142	234	116	130	622

2: Approvals April 2011 to end of March 2016

RenewableType	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Single Wind Turbine	266	499	387	366	236	1754
Wind Farm	10	11	8	9	9	47
Grand Total	276	510	395	375	245	1801

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many planning applications for wind farms were approved from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 2396/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see the tables below which provide the information requested. Table 1 outlines approvals of wind farms and wind turbines from May 2007 to end of March 2011. Table 2 provides details of wind farms and wind turbines approved between April 2011 to the end of March 2016, as this is the latest official statistics published by the Department.

1: Approvals May 2007 to end of March 2011

RenewableType	May-07 to end Mar-08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
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Wind Farm	11	10	14	12	47
Grand Total	142	234	116	130	622

2: Approvals April 2011 to end of March 2016

RenewableType	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Single Wind Turbine	266	499	387	366	236	1754
Wind Farm	10	11	8	9	9	47
Grand Total	276	510	395	375	245	1801

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many planning applications for single wind turbines have been approved from April 2011 to September 2016.

(AQW 2397/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see the tables below which provide the information requested. Table 1 outlines approvals of wind farms and wind turbines from May 2007 to end of March 2011. Table 2 provides details of wind farms and wind turbines approved between April 2011 to the end of March 2016, as this is the latest official statistics published by the Department.

1: Approvals May 2007 to end of March 2011

RenewableType	May-07 to end Mar-08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
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Grand Total	142	234	116	130	622

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RenewableType	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Single Wind Turbine	266	499	387	366	236	1754
Wind Farm	10	11	8	9	9	47
Grand Total	276	510	395	375	245	1801

Mr Allen asked the Minister for Infrastructure how many planning applications for single wind turbines were approved from May 2007 to April 2011.

(AQW 2398/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Please see the tables below which provide the information requested. Table 1 outlines approvals of wind farms and wind turbines from May 2007 to end of March 2011. Table 2 provides details of wind farms and wind turbines approved between April 2011 to the end of March 2016, as this is the latest official statistics published by the Department.

1: Approvals May 2007 to end of March 2011

RenewableType	May-07 to end Mar-08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Total
Single Wind Turbine	131	224	102	118	575
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2: Approvals April 2011 to end of March 2016

RenewableType	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	Total
Single Wind Turbine	266	499	387	366	236	1754
Wind Farm	10	11	8	9	9	47
Grand Total	276	510	395	375	245	1801

Mr Beattie asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the measures he will be taking to raise the new LED street lighting heads in the Craigavon area from the present 5.1 metres to 6 metres; and (ii) whether he would consider the Corcraun and Redmondville developments in Portadown to act as a pilot for the raising of the LED lighting heads to assess it as a cost saving measure.

(AQW 2430/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The overall raising of all the new LED street lighting heads in the Craigavon area is not a measure that my Department is planning to do.

In those cases where my officials receive a query about the lighting levels provided by LED lanterns and the levels do not meet the standard that the Department is aiming to provide, then raising the mounting height of a LED lantern is only one of a range of engineering solutions that could be considered to resolve the query.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the locations in East Londonderry where the car tax evasion vehicle is deployed; and (ii) the detection and prosecution rates for each location.

(AQW 2431/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) manages two Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) mobile camera units in Northern Ireland, on behalf of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in Swansea and under the terms of an Agency Agreement. The cameras are routinely deployed in or in the vicinity of all main postal towns or associated arterial routes on a rolling basis and taking cognisance of local circumstances and road safety conditions. The actual location for the camera setup on any particular road is determined by the ANPR operators on the day, taking account of local factors in place.

The locations in this constituency are detailed below.

Coleraine

Union Street, BT52
A29 Ring Road, BT52
Dunhill Road, BT51
Hanover Place, BT52

Portrush

Coleraine Road, BT56

Ballykelly

A2, BT49

Limavady

A371 Main Street, BT49

Dungiven

A6, BT47

My Department does not hold information about the detection and prosecution rates arising from ANPR camera detections. The data from the cameras is forwarded directly to DVLA for upload onto their computer systems. This would fall within DVLA's remit.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, in relation to taxi meter testing, whether the seal is the only evidence of meter tampering.

(AQW 2433/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The taximeter seal is not the only indicator of meter tampering.

When a taxi passes its taximeter test, the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) seal the programming port and the point where the meter is attached to the vehicle.

A tamper evident label is also attached to the vehicle which contains vehicle specific information at the time of testing and sealing such as, the tariff programme code, tyre size and the number of pulses transmitted from the vehicle to the taximeter over a given distance. Should any of this information be different than that displayed on the label, when the vehicle is later inspected or during an enforcement check, DVA will be alerted that the taximeter settings are incorrect, and that the taximeter may need to be recalibrated, retested and resealed.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed A24 Ballynahinch Bypass.

(AQW 2440/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A significant amount of work has been completed on the A24 Ballynahinch Bypass, to progress the scheme through the Preliminary Options, Preferred Option and Proposed Option scheme assessments. This work enabled publication of the Environmental Statement, draft Direction and draft Vesting Orders in March 2015.

The former Department for Regional Development received a number of objections during the statutory consultation period for the draft Orders and it was determined appropriate to convene a Public Inquiry to examine the case for and against the Proposed Scheme. The Inquiry was held on 26 and 27 January 2016.

The Inspector's Report of the Inquiry was subsequently received in March 2016 and my Department's project development team have considered the report and recommendations and are currently finalising a report for my consideration.

Subject to a satisfactory outcome, my Department will publish the Environmental Statement Notice of Intention to Proceed and make the Direction Order for the Proposed Scheme. I expect the making of the Vesting Order for the scheme will be delayed to align with the construction programme for the bypass.

Ballynahinch Bypass is not one of my Department's Flagship Projects and its progression to procurement and subsequent construction will be dependent on the approval of the business case, clearing the statutory procedures, and funding being made available to my Department.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure with reference to the new dual carriageway from Randalstown to Toome and Toome to Castledawson, for a breakdown of (i) the proposed £160 million cost; and (ii) the proposed four year construction period.

(AQW 2441/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Firstly, I am pleased to advise that advance Archaeological and Ground Investigatory works have already commenced on the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling project, with officials working, in coordination with the appointed contractor and local landowners to expediently progress the construction phase of the works.

The current programme for the works illustrates a 2 phased opening of the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme, with the 7.3 km Randalstown to Toome section projected to be open in early 2019 and the 7.4km Toome to Castledawson section projected to be open in early 2020.

The length of carriageway being constructed on both sides of the Toome Bypass is comparable but the variance in construction duration is largely attributable to our restriction on access between Toome and Castledawson. The restricted access will ensure effective management of the environmentally sensitive Lough Beg Special Protected Area (SPA) and its key features. For example Major Works have been restricted in the Creagh Whooper Swan complex from October to March each year, to safeguard this over-wintering habitat and preserve the integrity of these protected ecological features.

With regard to the Department of Finance approved total scheme cost, the total construction cost accounts for approximately £128million of the £160million, with the remainder for associated costs such as risk, lands compensation, design preparation and supervision costs.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he will be bring forward proposals to close the gap junctions on the A1 between Loughbrickland and Beech Hill (Newry) by commencing planning for grade-separated junctions.
(AQW 2442/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is continuing to progress the A1 Junctions Phase 2 proposal which involves upgrading the stretch between Hillsborough Roundabout and Loughbrickland.

The A1 between Loughbrickland and Beech Hill, which was upgraded to dual-carriageway standard and opened to traffic in 2006, is not included in this proposal. Improvements to this stretch of the A1 would be improved under a future 'A1 Junctions Phase 3' proposal.

My Department is progressing the development of new Transport Plans, in line with 'The New Approach to Regional Transportation', which will set out a long-term programme of investment.

Although at this time no commitment can be given on funding to progress further improvements to the A1 dual-carriageway, the 'A1 Junctions Phase 3' proposal can be considered, along with other existing and proposed schemes elsewhere in the north of Ireland.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the road maintenance budget deficit in East Derry.
(AQW 2444/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department does not allocate funding on a constituency basis.

However, it has been independently established that some £141 million per annum, based on 2016 prices, is needed to maintain the structural integrity of the entire road network in the north. The structural maintenance budget for the current financial year (2016/17) is currently estimated at £66 million, leaving a shortfall of around £75 million.

TransportNI allocates additional funding to its four Divisions on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to each maintenance activity i.e. resurfacing, patching, gully emptying, grass cutting etc. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds.

East Londonderry is predominantly located in TransportNI's Northern Division. The current forecast expenditure on Structural Maintenance in Northern Division in 2016/17 is some £14.6 million.

The Member should be assured that I will continue to discuss the need for additional funds for this key area as opportunities arise.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has plans to upgrade the A4.
(AQW 2446/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has carried out very significant road improvement schemes along the A4 Belfast to Sligo route in recent years. These have included the new 20km dual carriageway between Dungannon and Ballygawley as well as a 3.8km road realignment at Annaghilla, both of which opened to traffic in 2010. A number of other schemes were also delivered to improve overtaking between Ballygawley and Enniskillen and a significant road widening scheme at the Henry Street / Sligo Road junction within Enniskillen town was also completed. Cumulatively these schemes have made a significant contribution to journey time savings and road safety along the A4 route.

Looking to the future, the design and development of the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass continues to progress and it is planned to publish the draft statutory orders and environmental statement in 2017. The provision of a bypass around Fivemiletown is also included in the Strategic Road Improvement Programme.

On a general note my Department is progressing the development of new Transport Plans in line with The New Approach to Regional Transportation, and this will set out a long-term programme of investment. Development of these plans will provide an opportunity for all strategic roads projects across the north, including upgrades to the A4, to be considered for funding.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure how his Department plans to increase safety and reduce road traffic collisions near schools such as St Conor's Primary School, Lammy and including partnership working with the Department of Education.

(AQW 2449/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department treats the safety of school children as one of its highest priorities and over many years has invested significantly in measures to reduce vehicle speeds and improve road safety for children. In the last three years, road safety improvements have been provided at 73 schools as part of the School Travel and Safety Projects initiative.

Dangers from road traffic at schools are varied and are assessed by experienced TransportNI traffic engineers. The engineers can call upon a number of measures to improve safety including provision of enhanced signing and lining, central islands, lay-bys, and traffic calming features such as road humps. Safer Routes to Schools signs with flashing lights are already present at St Conor's Primary School and a school crossing patrol person operates at the school entrance.

A recent innovation has been the development of part-time 20 mph speed limits at schools, especially at those on roads where the national speed limit applies. I have asked my officials to consider further refinements of this measure that would facilitate an increased provision. TransportNI's policy for road safety at schools is available for download at www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/road-safety-schools-rsppg-e070

Since 2013, the former Department for Regional Development and now my Department and the Public Health Agency have funded an Active School Travel programme. The Department of Education has also contributed to that programme by providing such facilities as new bicycle shelters within school grounds. Infrastructure in the vicinity of participating schools has also been provided under the programme by my Department. The Active School Travel programme aims to encourage more children to walk or cycle to school and provides walking and cycling skills training so that children can travel to school more safely.

Each year schools throughout the north are invited to participate in this programme. Over 185 schools have done so in the past three years, and I recently announced the continuation of the programme to 2021.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A5 redevelopment.

(AQW 2451/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A consultation period on relevant draft Vesting Orders, a draft Direction Order and a new Environmental Statement for the A5 Western Transport Corridor Scheme commenced on 16 February 2016 and concluded on 2 June 2016.

A Public Inquiry into the proposed scheme is scheduled to open on 4 October 2016. My Department has appointed the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) as the independent Inspector to administer the Inquiry. The Inspector's Report is expected around May 2017.

In late August 2016 the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A) applied for leave for a Judicial Review on two matters relating to the scheme. The Department is opposing the application for leave and is seeking an early resolution on the matter through the Courts.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) the terms of the abstraction licence granted for the River Faughan; (ii) the volume of water that Water Service is allowed to abstract from the River Faughan under the terms of the current abstraction licence; (iii) the volume of water that Water Service was allowed to abstract from the River Faughan under the terms of the previous abstraction licence; and (iv) the volume of water that has actually been abstracted year on year over the last twenty years.

(AQW 2483/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NI Water) that: (i) the abstraction of water from the River Faughan is permitted under the Abstraction and Impoundment Licence issued to NI Water for Carmoney Water Treatment Works in March 2007. The Licence was granted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006; (ii) under the terms of the licence NI Water is permitted to abstract up to 55 megalitres per day (ML/d); (iii) there was no previous abstraction licence; and (iv) NI Water does not hold details of abstraction from before the licence was issued in 2007. The volume of water abstracted from 2007 is detailed in the table below.

Year	Daily Average (ML/d)	Annual Total (ML)
2007	26.86	9804.00
2008	24.72	9022.00
2009	24.13	8807.00
2010	25.65	9514.50
2011	23.39	8536.49
2012	19.42	7069.26
2013	17.05	6224.09

Year	Daily Average (ML/d)	Annual Total (ML)
2014	17.42	6355.54
2015	17.27	6304.40

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the busiest fifty sections of road.
(AQW 2485/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's Roads and Rivers Agency publishes the results of traffic surveys carried out on strategic and other specified routes as part of the Annual Traffic Census and Variations in Traffic Flow Report. The latest report available is for 2014.

The Annual Average Daily Traffic (ADDT) on Northern Ireland's 50 busiest census points are provided in the table below:

Route No.	Route	Location	Annual Average Daily Traffic (ADDT)
1	A12	Westlink, Belfast, South of Roden Street	92220
2	M1	Broadway (Junction 1) - Stockman's Lane (Junction 2)	85800
3	M2	Greencastle (Junction 2) – Sandyknowes (Junction 4)	65460
4	M1	Stockman's Lane Junction (above roundabout)	65000
5	A2	Sydenham By-Pass, at George Best Belfast City Airport	58050
6	M1	Blacks Road (Junction 3) – Saintfield Road (Junction 6)	53190
7	M2	Fortwilliam Interchange – Inbound (Junction 1)	49530
8	M2	Fortwilliam Interchange – Outbound (Junction 1)	46440
9	A2	Hollywood By-Pass, East of Belfast Road	45040
10	M2	Sandyknowes (Junction 4) – Templepatrick (Junction 5)	43790
11	A12	Westlink at Divis Street (To M2)	43690
12	A12	Westlink, Clifton Street, towards M2	43570
13	M2	Rathbeg (Junction 6) - Templepatrick (Junction 5)	41640
14	A1	Lisburn - Hillsborough (at Harry's Road)	39780
15	M2	Rathbeg (Junction 6) – Dunsilly (Junction 1 on M22)	39160
16	A12	Westlink, Clifton Street, towards M1	38470
17	M1	Sprucefield (Junction 7) – Moira (Junction 9)	37230
18	M1	Junction 9 to 10 near Knockadoney Bridge	35580
19	A12	Westlink at Divis Street (To M1)	35530
20	M1	Lough Road (Junction 10) - Ballynacor (Junction 11)	35520
21	A2	Belfast - Bangor, at Cultra, East of Folk Museum	35010
22	A2	Strand Road, Londonderry	34420
23	A55	Upper Knockbreda Road, Belfast	34310
24	A1	Hillsborough By-Pass, North of Moira Road	33860
25	A55	Knock Road, Castlereagh, at Shandon Park	33800
26	A55	Stockmans Lane North West of Boucher Road	33390
27	M5	Greencastle (Junction 2) - Whiteabbey	31860
28	A26	Antrim - Ballymena, North of Dunsilly	30600
29	A55	Shaws Bridge, Belfast	30170
30	A515	Foyle Bridge, Londonderry	30090
31	A29	Coleraine Ring Road, at Sandelford Bridge	28390

Route No.	Route	Location	Annual Average Daily Traffic (ADDT)
32	A55	Belvoir Road at Newtownbreda High School	28240
33	A24	Belfast, Saintfield Road (near Knockbracken Road at KFC)	28190
34	A1	Dromore – Banbridge, South of Old Banbridge Road	28150
35	A2	Limavady Road, Londonderry, at Gransha	27800
36	A3	Northway, Portadown, South of Seagoe Road link	27460
37	A2	Shore Road South of Jordanstown Road	26790
38	A6	Dungiven Road, Londonderry, at Altnagelvin Roundabout	26720
39	A24	Ormeau Rd at Knockbreda Pk	26360
40	A1	Banbridge By-Pass, North of Old Manse Road	25570
41	M2	Larne Road (Junction 10) - Broughshane Road (Junction 11)	25430
42	A2	Culmore Road, Londonderry, at St.Peters Church	25330
43	A514	Crescent Link, Londonderry, at Caw	25180
44	A55	Parkway, Belfast	24420
45	A6	Dungiven Road, Londonderry, at Rosstown Roundabout	24250
46	A2	Craigavon Bridge, Londonderry (upper deck)	23870
47	A1	Loughbrickland – Newry, South of Moneymore Road	23820
48	C/UC	Boucher Road, Belfast, near Balmoral Road	23640
49	A29	Coleraine Ring Road, between A26 - B67	23620
50	A2	Carrickfergus - Belfast	23440

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the planned works to alleviate flooding in the Finaghy area. (AQW 2486/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are a number of schemes currently planned, or ongoing, which are aimed at reducing the risk of flooding in the Finaghy area.

NI Water is leading on the design and procurement of a joint scheme, with Rivers Agency, to upgrade the sewerage and drainage infrastructure from the junction of the Upper Malone Road / Greystown Avenue to Sicily Park. This scheme is currently at the detailed design stage, and NI Water has advised that it is anticipated to commence on site in late 2016/17.

A separate Rivers scheme is ongoing at Kinnegar / Locksley Park, this scheme involves works to improve the structural condition of the recently designated culverted watercourses in the area. It is anticipated that this scheme will be completed in late autumn 2016.

NI Water has also developed a multi-million pound engineering project to further reduce the risk of internal property flooding in the Sicily Park area. This scheme aims to contain flood waters within the flood plain of a local watercourse, during extreme rainfall conditions.

The optioneering and development process for this element of work is now complete, and NI Water is progressing the preferred option through the detailed design stage. This stage includes site investigations, obtaining statutory approvals and reaching agreement with a number of property owners and a range of stakeholders, who may be impacted by the proposed construction work.

However, timely progress of this scheme is highly dependent on reaching agreement with the third party land owners affected.

NI Water engagement with key stakeholders continues, including updating local residents and elected representatives regarding progress of this scheme.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many streetlights were not functioning in South Belfast in May 2015, December 2015 and August 2016.

(AQW 2487/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department's street lighting management system, does not maintain the requested information on street lighting faults.

Details of reported outages (non functioning lights) in TransportNI boundary of South Belfast on May 2015, December 2015 and August 2016 are shown in the table below:

Period	Number of Outages
May 2015	34
December 2015	1322
August 2016	362

My Department's street lighting management system does not correlate information in the format of Belfast South electoral boundary, instead it uses the TransportNI Belfast South section boundary which is comparable.

My Department has also introduced a new on-line reporting facility for street lighting faults. The public can assist us by reporting faults on the NI Direct web site, under 'Street Lighting and reporting a Fault'. Callers can also report street lighting faults by telephone to 0300 200 7899.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether Mount Michael Park will have its gritting service returned.
(AQW 2488/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Unfortunately Mount Michael Park does not meet the criteria for inclusion on the winter salting schedule as it does not carry the required volume of traffic and is not a main through route. This decision has been reviewed a number of times and additional traffic counts have been undertaken. These counts have confirmed that Mount Michael Park does not meet the criteria. However, a number of salt bins have been placed in Mount Michael Park for local residents to use on a self help basis.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many times a year the grass will be cut on the A55 Belvoir Road.
(AQW 2489/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As I am sure you are aware the Department's routine maintenance budget which includes activities such as patching, grass cutting, gully emptying and weed spraying, was some £15 million below the level required to allow the level of service people have come to expect in recent years. As a result TransportNI had to reduce its routine road maintenance regime to a limited service.

However, as part of June monitoring an additional £5m has been allocated to the Department for routine maintenance activities which will allow TransportNI to enhance the level of service which it can provide. This additional funding will allow grass to be cut twice on the A55 Belvoir Road as required during 2016/17 compared to the originally planned single cut.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the steps his Department will take to alleviate parking issues around South Belfast schools.
(AQW 2490/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Increased localised parking occurs during peak school times when children are dropped off or picked up. Parking of this nature is typical of many schools in the Greater Belfast area and is usually only for a short duration.

My Department is currently engaged in 2 programmes to reduce congestion in and around schools. These are:

The Safer Routes to School Programme

There are a number of measures under the Safer Routes to School programme which can be implemented to address road safety issues related to the school journeys, including 'School' signs with flashing lights and red strip surfacing. These measures are used to raise awareness of the presence of the school children and help to identify the crossing point of the school crossing patrol. All requests submitted to TransportNI for inclusion in this programme are assessed and ranked in order of priority, following which our annual programme of works is drawn up.

The Active School Travel Programme

My Department is also working in partnership with Public Health Agency to fund the Active School Travel Programme. This is an initiative that aims to increase physical activity in children; reduce congestion around schools; improve health and road safety awareness and improve confidence, all of which can contribute to improved health and educational achievement. The Programme began in 2013 and since then 191 schools have enrolled with more than 60,000 children taking part. 38 schools in Belfast have taken part including seven in South Belfast. This has resulted in an increase in cycling and walking for the school commute and a reduction in car congestion around participating schools.

I recently announced a new programme which will run for the next five years (2016 – 21). Schools are currently being invited to apply for this year's programme with a closing date of 30 September 2016.

I appreciate residents' frustration regarding parking issues and obstruction caused by parents. If any vehicles cause obstruction or are driven in a dangerous manner, this is an offence which can only be dealt with by the police. Should this occur residents should contact their local station or telephone number 101.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the consideration his Department has given to the extension of a full fare smart pass to people registered as partially sighted.

(AQW 2501/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There is currently no provision within the concessionary fares budget to support any further extension of the scheme. Whilst I remain sympathetic to calls to extend free travel to those who are partially sighted there are no plans to further extend the scheme at present.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether Translink's safety risk assessment of Cullybackey level crossing has been completed; and (ii) if so, to detail the result.

(AQW 2510/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A site visit to Cullybackey level crossing has been conducted and Translink has received the draft report of the independent safety assessment carried out to assess the likely impact of opening a new Park & Ride adjacent to Cullybackey Level Crossing. The report is positive and Translink is currently developing a plan for the Cullybackey Park & Ride, to be issued by October.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure how he plans to address traffic congestion and the required upgrades at the junction of Ardglass Road and Edward Street, Downpatrick.

(AQW 2513/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has recently completed a Transportation Review of Downpatrick which included an assessment of the junction at Ardglass Road / Edward Street, Downpatrick.

The results of this assessment showed traffic progression was generally good throughout the day at this junction, although some minimal queuing was evident in the morning peak. These queues were of a short duration with a maximum of seven cars recorded. This would not be considered excessive and my Department, therefore, has no plans to carry out any improvements at this junction at this time.

However, it is recognised that due to increased development of lands off Ardglass Road, there is the potential for traffic patterns at this junction to change in the future. This junction will therefore be kept under review and amendments / improvements brought forward as and when required.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the steps he took to consult with and inform traders in Irish Street, Downpatrick regarding the intended closure of Irish Street to traffic to remove the blast wall at the old PSNI station.

(AQW 2514/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department as Roads Authority is responsible for the approval of road closures and when that closure extends beyond a two week period, such as the Irish Street closure, we advertise the details in local papers. In addition to this my Department advises key stakeholders and publishes details on our website for road user information.

Consultation with traders, frontagers and those affected by any road closure is the responsibility of the body carrying out the works, who on this project is the PSNI Estate Management.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what the Driver and Vehicle Agency class as one mile in both yards and metres.

(AQW 2521/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) regard one mile as equating to 1,760 yards or 1,609.344 metres.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will take into regard the recent coroner's report in considering any future works to enhance the safety of the section of the A26 between the Ballee Road roundabout and the Dunsilly roundabout.

(AQW 2530/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can confirm that I received a letter from the Coroner regarding safety at Woodgreen Road junction on the A26. My Department's TransportNI instigated a review of road safety on the A26 Lisnevenagh Road between Dunsilly Roundabout and Ballee Roundabout in 2015. This identified a number of junctions along the route for further investigation, including the junction at Woodgreen Road.

Detailed analysis of the collision history at these junctions highlighted a number of common causation factors that could be addressed through engineering measures. TransportNI is currently consulting on a proposal to prohibit right turning movements out of Woodgreen Road, the type of manoeuvre that resulted in recent fatalities.

I and my Department place a high priority on road safety and I trust the above information will assure you that significant action is being taken to reduce the risk of collisions at this junction, as requested by the Coroner.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the A5 road project.

(AQW 2535/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A consultation period on relevant draft Vesting Orders, a draft Direction Order and a new Environmental Statement for the A5 Western Transport Corridor Scheme commenced on 16 February 2016 and concluded on 2 June 2016.

A Public Inquiry into the proposed scheme is scheduled to open on 4 October 2016. My Department has appointed the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) as the independent Inspector to administer the Inquiry. The Inspector's Report is expected around May 2017.

In late August 2016 the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A) applied for leave for a Judicial Review on two matters relating to the scheme. The Department is opposing the application for leave and is seeking an early resolution on the matter through the Courts.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will review Transport NI's decision not to introduce any measures to enhance road safety on Bellspark Road in Clady in its 2016-17 works schedule.

(AQW 2536/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is committed to carrying out the programme of works as outlined in the 2016-17 Spring Report which was delivered to Derry City and Strabane District Council in June of this year. Bellspark Road has benefited from improvements in previous years and this year Safer Routes to Schools signs are to be erected at St Columba's Primary School which is located on the Bellspark Road.

In relation to other improvements, officials are presently in the process of vesting land at the junction of Bellspark Road/ Prospect Road to improve the sightlines on the approach to the junction. Delivery of this and other improvement schemes on the Bellspark Road, will depend on the future availability of funding

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on Translink's plans, working in partnership with the Western Health and Social Care Trust, to deliver public transport links to and from the new Enhanced Local Hospital and Primary Care Complex in Omagh, particularly to and from Omagh town centre.

(AQW 2541/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink have had a series of workshops and meetings with the Western Health and Social Care Trust to determine the level of public transport required to serve the new Enhanced Local Hospital and Primary Care Complex in Omagh.

Whilst discussions between Translink and the Trust are still ongoing, it is proposed that a 30 minute frequency service will operate between Omagh Town Centre and the new facility throughout the day until 18:00 hrs with an hourly service until 21:00 hrs Monday-Friday. On Saturdays, Ulsterbus service 384E will provide transport to the complex.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how his Department calculates the average cost of trips under the Dial-a-Lift service.

(AQW 2552/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: To calculate an average cost of trip within an operational area in which Dial-a-Lift services are provided, the amount of Departmental funding is divided by the total number of individual trips delivered.

It is important to note that comparisons between partnerships can be complex and need to take account of the geographical size of each partnership area, the distance members live from the Partnership location and local services, and the administrative and operational costs of delivering the Dial-a-Lift service.

Mr McPhillips asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the need to upgrade the transport infrastructure in Fermanagh and South Tyrone to increase foreign direct investment.

(AQW 2554/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Our transport infrastructure needs to be fit for purpose if we are to create the conditions to support economic growth and job creation right across the north of Ireland. For that reason I have set out my clear commitment to address the legacy of underinvestment in our strategic network, particularly in the west, to mitigate a key barrier to balanced regional growth.

In that context I am committed to progressing the A5 road scheme and a number of other strategic road improvements in the West, progression of which will be subject to the availability of funds and successful completion of statutory processes. These schemes include the A4 Enniskillen Southern Bypass, the A32 Omagh to Enniskillen Improvement Strategy and the A4 Fivemiletown Bypass.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the proposed cycle routes in Omagh at Crevenagh Road, Great Northern Road and Irishtown Road.

(AQW 2560/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The works associated with the cycle routes at Crevenagh Road, Great Northern Road and Irishtown Road, Omagh have been completed. The legislative process to permit cyclists to use the cycle tracks is currently underway and it is anticipated that it will be completed within 6 to 8 weeks.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he has plans to construct a new railway halt at the City of Derry Airport.

(AQW 2568/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I welcome the announcement by the Executive of £7.5 million to secure the future of the airport which is a regionally significant gateway for the North West in terms of onward connectivity, inward investment and tourism. In support of this development I will continue to explore options to enhance local connections to and from the airport.

In supporting the use of public transport and enhancing access to the airport there would appear to be obvious merits in providing a halt at this location. For a rail link to be economically viable at Belfast International Airport it is estimated that annual passengers using the airport would have to be around 10 million. Last year the numbers using City of Derry Airport were 284,000.

In these circumstances it is unlikely that the rail could provide a more effective public transport link than the regular bus services between Derry and Coleraine which set down and pick up at the airport terminal.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure what is reason for the delay in building the two pedestrian refuge islands for the Ballycrochan Road, Bangor.

(AQW 2580/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Two pedestrian refuge islands have been identified for provision on Ballycrochan Road, Bangor. Limited funding for Local Transport and Safety Measures for this year resulted in the pedestrian islands on Ballycrochan Road being identified as a reserve scheme.

However, delays in completion of programmed work elsewhere within the Council area has resulted in funding being reallocated to the delivery of the Ballycrochan Road proposals. The islands are now being programmed to be provided before the end of the current financial year.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure what is the requirement on taxi operators to fit fare metres.

(AQW 2582/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: From 31 May 2016 all Class A and B taxis were required to install and use an approved taximeter and printer and adhere to a new maximum fare.

Following representations from the taxi industry concerning lead in times it was decided that the new requirements would not be fully enforced until 1 October 2016.

Under Section 18 (Regulation of taximeters etc.) of the Taxis Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 it is an offence for the owner of the taxi, the driver of the taxi and taxi operator to use a taxi without a taximeter. Each is guilty of an offence.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure when guidance will be issued on the requirement for taxi operators to fit a meter to all vehicles.

(AQW 2584/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The requirement to fit taximeters (Class A and Class B taxis only) is set out in the Taxis (Taximeters, Devices and Maximum Fares) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015, which were introduced on 31 May 2016.

In the months leading up to the introduction of the new Taxi Regulations my officials were in regular contact with the taxi industry. On 4 February 2016, the former Department of the Environment (DOE) issued a mail shot communication to all taxi drivers and taxi operators informing them of the important changes that would be taking place in the taxi industry when the Regulations are introduced. In particular, it contained detailed information about the new taxi classes; the new taxi test; the taximeter test; important dates for them to note; and where to get more information. Owners of Class A and Class B taxis were advised that their taxis must have an approved taximeter and printer installed and, from the date of the next vehicle test, the taximeter must be tested and sealed and a new style roofsign must be displayed.

On 25 April 2016, the taxi industry was advised that 'from 31 May 2016 it will be a legal requirement for all Class A and Class B taxis to have an approved taximeter and printer fitted'. However, because of concerns raised by the industry about the lead in time for the new taximeter requirements, my predecessor had decided that until 1 October 2016 taximeter enforcement action at the roadside would be limited to education and advice.

I recognise that the introduction of the new Taxi Regulations has not been without some difficulties, but I can assure you that my officials will continue to work closely with taxi drivers and taxi operators to provide them with whatever assistance is necessary to help them comply with the new Regulations.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure what measures his Department is taking to ensure the enforcement of new regulations for the taxi industry.

(AQW 2585/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) has primary responsibility for the regulation of the taxi industry. DVA enforcement officers conduct a wide range of checks on vehicles, drivers and operators, both at the roadside and commercial premises, to ensure compliance with the regulations. Enforcement resources are targeted against the most non-compliant operators and drivers.

Since the introduction of new taxi legislation on 31 May 2016, DVA has revised its enforcement policies and procedures to give full effect to these regulations and the various rules that apply to each prescribed class of taxi. Roadworthiness and traffic offences will continue to be dealt with through a variety of sanctions including enforcement notices, fixed penalty notices, prohibition notices and prosecutions. Additional powers to seize unlicensed vehicles suspected of illegal taxiing should act as a further deterrent to improve overall compliance within the taxi industry.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail departmental projects that are dependent on European Union funding sources.

(AQW 2591/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: EU funding can provide a valuable boost to the infrastructure budget to allow for an acceleration and expansion of the strategic infrastructure programme. However delivery of projects is not ordinarily dependent on EU funding.

Given the Chancellor's announcement that Westminster would honour ERDF funded projects in receipt of grant offers before his Autumn Statement on 23 November there are a number of projects that are likely to benefit from EU funding in the short term. I am hopeful of positive decisions for these projects.

My Department recently submitted a Stage 2 application for €20m of EU funding from the INTERREG VA Territorial Co-operation Programme for the development of the North West Multimodal Transport Hub located in the city of Derry.

One of my Department's Arms Length Bodies, NI Water, has been involved in the development of two joint project applications under INTERREG VA; The Sustainable Catchment Area Management Plan project and the Shared Waters Enhancement and Loughs Legacy Project. The total EU funding sought for these applications is €36 million.

Waterways Ireland, a North South Implementation Body sponsored by my Department, has in partnership with Monaghan County Council; Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; and East Border Region Ltd. submitted an INTERREG VA application to develop a greenway along the route of the Ulster Canal from Smithborough, Co. Monaghan to Middletown, Co. Armagh. The total EU funding sought for this application is €4.2 million.

I have also asked my officials to engage fully with the European Commission and to continue to pursue every opportunity to draw down EU funds for the benefit of the north.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the current weed spraying programme in North Down; and (ii) to detail the provision for a full programme of weed control in 2017/18.

(AQW 2599/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) I can advise the Member that there was a delay in starting the weed spraying programme in North Down this year due to contractual issues. However, these have been resolved and a programme of chemical weed control has been ongoing for the past few weeks.
- (ii) I regret that I am not in a position at this time to confirm the 2017/18 weed control programme as budgets have not yet been fixed.

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) for an update on the current grass cutting programme in North Down; and (ii) to detail the provision for a full programme of grass cutting in 2017/18.

(AQW 2600/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) I can advise the Member that the first cut is almost complete with some sightlines having received an additional cut for road safety reasons

The Member will be aware that I committed my Department's TransportNI to carry out two full cuts this year across both urban and rural areas. The second cut will follow on immediately after the first cut has been completed.

- (ii) I regret that I am not in a position at this time to confirm the 2017/18 grass cutting programme as budgets have not yet been fixed.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Rathgill Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2622/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Bloomfield Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2623/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Towerview area.

(AQW 2624/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Breezemount Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2625/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in Conlig.

(AQW 2626/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure what steps have been taken by his Department to advance the Strabane Town Centre Footbridge project; and what discussions he has had regarding this project with Derry and Strabane District Council.

(AQW 2629/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department remains committed to providing a town centre footbridge downstream of Strabane Bridge. Delivery of the project is subject to the availability of funding and in the current economic climate it is unlikely that the town centre footbridge will be able to proceed in the short term solely funded from my Department's resources.

My officials recently met with Derry City and Strabane District Council to review how the project might be advanced and the matter of funding formed part of those discussions.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the requirement for taxi meters to be fitted to vehicles in order to pass the PSV test.

(AQW 2631/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The purpose of requiring specific classes of taxis in the north of Ireland to have a taximeter and printer is to ensure accountability, to promote fare transparency and to help prevent overcharging. The requirement was a central tenet of the Taxis Act (NI) 2008.

Given that they are now an integral part of the taxi, it is important that the requirements are tested by DVA in advance of issuing the vehicle with a Taxi Licence (formerly known as a PSV Licence).

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he is aware of evidence of items of untreated sewage being washed up along the shoreline in the Donaghadee Harbour area; and (ii) to detail source of this problem; and (iii) if any outlets in that coastal area still discharge untreated sewage into the sea.

(AQW 2650/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is not aware of any evidence of items of untreated sewage being washed up along the shoreline in the Donaghadee Harbour area. NI Water has been in contact with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), which has confirmed that a recent inspection of the area on 12 September revealed "no pollution found."

In addition, NIEA and the Marine and Fisheries Division have advised that they have not received any recent complaints about untreated sewage being washed up at this location. NI Water cannot therefore provide any information on the potential source of an unsubstantiated report of pollution.

The sewer network serving the Donaghadee area is mostly a combined system and includes 46 Consented Intermittent Overflow discharges to the sea. These overflows provide emergency relief points within a sewer system and only discharge during heavy rainfall or emergency circumstances. These discharge points are regulated by NIEA and must comply with a range of conditions and standards to prevent pollution. None of the overflows discharge directly to the shore in the vicinity of the Donaghadee Harbour.

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he will agree the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council's Statement of Community Involvement and their Local Development Plan.

(AQW 2651/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I acknowledge the work undertaken to date in developing the Causeway Coast and Glens Council's Statement of Community Involvement and Local Development Plan timetable and am please to advise that both of these documents have been agreed by my Department.

Mr Robison asked the Minister for Infrastructure when his Department decided to stop illuminating all road signs.

(AQW 2659/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The policy on the illumination of traffic signs was last updated in June 2012 by the then Department for Regional Development.

The policy states that, with some limited exceptions, signs should not be lit using an integral lighting unit. Instead, all traffic signs must now be manufactured using appropriate retro-reflective sign-face material that will provide an alternative form of illumination when the sign is exposed to headlight beams from approaching vehicles.

It is considered that the use of such modern retro-reflective sign-face materials will provide a more efficient and cost effective means of enhancing the visibility of traffic signs at night while reducing the cost of provision and maintenance as well as energy costs.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any departmental street plans to alleviate traffic congestion in South Belfast.

(AQW 2691/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Traffic congestion at peak times is a common problem in most medium and large cities and Belfast is no different in that during the rush hour, our road and transportation system is operating at its maximum capacity.

My Department has put a number of important measures in place to help manage this traffic congestion including:

- Live traffic information is available on the Trafficwatchni website, on social media platforms, and frequent updates are broadcast on local radio stations. This keeps commuters informed about where the key problems are and allows them to plan their journeys more effectively.
- The Traffic Control Centre monitors 156 CCTV cameras across the city and uses this information to continuously update traffic signal timings at over 200 traffic light junctions, based on actual traffic flows. This "live, up to the minute" programming of signal timings ensures the road network operates at its maximum efficiency at all times.
- My Department has over 50km of bus priority routes across Belfast at present and is working hard to develop a wider bus priority network by constructing the new Belfast Rapid Transit routes to provide a high class public transport facility to encourage more people to transfer from the private car to public transport. These routes are supported by a network of urban clearways which operate across the morning and evening peak hours.
- Traffic Attendants are deployed on all bus lanes and clearways each day to reduce instances of illegal parking or use of the bus lanes.
- Where there are ongoing congestion issues outside of Clearway times, my Department will consider the introduction of additional waiting restrictions (single or double yellow lines) to assist with traffic flows. Additional waiting restrictions were introduced on the Ormeau Road in January 2016.
- There is a series of Park & Ride sites around Belfast including a 720 space facility at Cairnshill serving the south Belfast area. Other sites include 320 spaces at Sprucefield and 240 spaces at Black's Road which also assist in

reducing congestion in the south Belfast area. My Department is currently working on proposals to increase the capacity of these two parks.

- I am also developing a wider cycling network across the city including the recently opened cycleway in Alfred Street. This represents a fresh approach to cycle priority and we are now constructing a series of other schemes to connect the suburbs of Belfast with the city centre.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail any departmental plans for transport links between Lisburn, Carryduff and Dundonald.
(AQW 2692/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no active proposals under consideration for new transport links between Lisburn, Carryduff and Dundonald at present.

Translink has a number of bus services running between Lisburn, Carryduff and Dundonald but does not have any plans for further transport links between these areas. This includes a daily bus service from Cairnshill Park and Ride to the Ulster Hospital at Dundonald.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when his Department plans to undertake works at the junction of Old Saintfield Road and Knockbracken Healthcare Park.
(AQW 2693/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department presently has no plans to undertake road works at the junction of the Old Saintfield Road and Knockbracken Healthcare Park.

However, there are currently three full planning applications for the Mealough Lands, Carryduff for 350 dwellings. The Transport Assessments submitted as part of the planning process for this residential development site propose improvements to the junction of Old Saintfield Road and Knockbracken Healthcare Park.

It should be noted that the developers will be directly responsible for implementing the road and traffic improvements associated with this development. The timescale for undertaking these improvement works is dependent upon the residential development receiving planning permission and the progress of the development.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the current completion date for the Magherafelt bypass.
(AQW 2694/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Construction work on the A31 Magherafelt bypass is at an advanced stage and it is anticipated that the new road will open to traffic in early October.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) his Department's plans to resurface Tullyhogue main street and other lengths along the B50; and (ii) the date for the completion for each.
(AQW 2695/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Work on the B520 Main Street Tullyhogue was programmed for earlier this year but was delayed pending the completion of a water main upgrade by NI Water. Following subsequent monitoring to ensure NI Water's trench reinstatement would not compromise this resurfacing scheme, TransportNI intend commencing work on site at Main Street Tullyhogue by mid-October.

I have assumed your reference to other works was intended for the remainder of the B520 between Cookstown and Stewartstown rather than the B50 which lies outside the Mid Ulster constituency.

TransportNI have just recently completed resurfacing the B520 Hillhead Road through the centre of Stewartstown and earlier this summer surface dressed 4km of the B520 along the Gortagammon and Donaghendry Roads between Tullyhogue and Stewartstown. No further works are planned on the remainder of the B520 at this time.

Mrs Overend asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the expansion of the Park and Ride facility at Castledawson roundabout.
(AQW 2697/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI is currently progressing a proposal to extend the existing Park and Ride facility at Castledawson Roundabout to provide an additional 192 spaces.

Officials are currently taking forward the vesting process to acquire the land necessary to facilitate provision of the scheme and, subject to successful completion of this process, it is hoped that construction of the facility could commence later this financial year.

Mr Smith asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how much his Department is spending on (i) grass cutting; and (ii) other roadside maintenance in 2016, broken down by each divisional area.
(AQW 2704/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I would advise that my Department's TransportNI allocates funding on an April to March, financial year basis, rather than on a calendar year.

Funding across its four Divisions is allocated on the basis of need, using a range of weighted indicators, tailored to maintenance activities. Grass Cutting and other roadside maintenance would be categorised as Routine Maintenance.

Forecast expenditure, by each Division, for Grass Cutting, Weed Control and Tree Maintenance in the financial year 2016-17 is detailed in Table 1 below –

Table 1 £'k

	East	North	South	West	Total
Grass Cutting, Weed Control & Tree Maintenance	£1,253	£2,260	£1,391	£1,651	£6,555

Forecast expenditure, by each Division, on other Routine Maintenance activities in 2016-17 are detailed in Table 2 below –

Table 2 £'k

	East	North	South	West	Total
Other Routine Maintenance	£1,789	£1,451k	£2,659	£2,657	£8,556

Other Routine Maintenance activities are Embankments, Safety Fences, Gully Emptying and Road Sweeping.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what consideration was given to the impact of the A6 dual carriageway between Toome and Castledawson on culturally important landscapes, with specific regard to the associated Environmental Impact Assessment.

(AQW 2708/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department is acutely aware of the importance of the local landscape referred to by Seamus Heaney, including Mossbawn and Lough Beg Strand. The new dual carriageway is a fair and reasonable balance of engineering, environmental and economic considerations, showing respect for the historic landscape. The preferred route decision was endorsed by the independent Inspector at the Public Inquiry in 2007, who noted that this proved to be one of the more challenging aspects on which to reach conclusion, however he concluded on balance the alignment presented was the most favourable.

As part of the consideration of the preferred route my officials engaged a cultural heritage specialist to review archaeological, industrial heritage and built heritage information, in addition to the comprehensive assessment of heritage detailed in the Environmental Statement. A copy of the specialists report is included at Appendix H in Volume 3, and summarised in Section 2.2 in Volume 1 of the Environmental Statement, available at this web address <https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/a6-toome-castledawson-environmental-statement>.

This work is being further supplemented by ongoing archaeological investigations and an ongoing series of consultations with statutory organisations in relation to the cultural heritage implications of the planned scheme.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Whitehill Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2733/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Kilcooley Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2734/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the decision to make taxi meters and printers mandatory, (i) to provide or place in the Assembly library copies of all correspondence issued by DVA in respect of the installation and regulation compliance of same; and (ii) to outline a detailed timeline of all departmental decisions relating to this, including the

issuing of correspondence to operators and/or drivers and indicating all instances of notification of enforceable regulations and their commencements.

(AQW 2736/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has issued four pieces of official correspondence referring to taximeter test requirements. A letter dated 4 February 2016 was issued to taxi drivers highlighting a range of forthcoming important changes including the timelines for the taximeter test requirements. The primary purpose of this letter was to provide drivers with advance notice of the new test requirements, with a view to ensuring a smooth transition into the new licensing system.

On 25 April 2016, the taxi industry was advised that 'from 31 May 2016 it will be a legal requirement for all Class A and Class B taxis to have an approved taximeter and printer fitted'. However, because of concerns raised by the industry about the lead in time for the new taximeter requirements, my predecessor had decided that until 1 October 2016 taximeter enforcement action at the roadside would be limited to education and advice.

Given the low volume of taximeter test applications received by 26 July 2016, DVA issued two taximeter test reminder letters on 8 August 2016 and 18 August 2016. The purpose of these letters was to remind taxi drivers, and to ask taxi operators to encourage their taxi drivers, to apply for their taximeter test without delay.

Copies of the correspondence referred to above will be placed in the Assembly library.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on any plans for a flood alleviation project for Clady village, Co Tyrone.

(AQW 2739/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following the significant flooding in 2015 a comprehensive post flood investigation was completed by Rivers Agency and emergency works were undertaken to restore the previous level of protection. These works included the repair of breaches in the existing flood defences and the provision of temporary defences, in the form of 2 tonne sandbags, on Donnygowan Burn.

A pre-feasibility study on flood defences for Clady Village has been completed and has recently been included on the Agency's Capital Works Prioritisation Programme. The scheme would include a more permanent solution for the Donnygowan Burn, which may require culverting and the construction of flood walls. We now plan to carry out a feasibility study and if a cost beneficial scheme is identified, the scheme will then progress to detailed design. Subject to these procedures, I would hope that the scheme would progress to the construction stage within the next 4 – 5 years, although I must stress that this is subject to funding being available and as you are aware, there is continued pressure on public expenditure.

Mr Beggs asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how £25,585.86 was spent by Northern Ireland Water in relation to the Woodburn exploration drilling project; (ii) the income that they received as a result of the lease; and (iii) the business case assessment made by Northern Ireland Water before agreeing to this lease arrangement.

(AQW 2746/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that:

- (i) the breakdown of the £25,585.86 expenditure is as follows:
 - Staff costs: £1,937.84
 - Contractor costs: £815.76
 - Analytical costs: £1,845.76
 - Legal costs: £20,986.50
- (ii) the document which was executed was a Licence Agreement. The licence fee was £32,800.00 per annum and was payable, pro rata, from 8 February 2016 until 27 December 2016, giving a figure of £29,096.77.
- (iii) NIW considered this matter in 2013 and, based upon the information available at that time, agreed to permit the exploratory drilling.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether the legislation to re-impose waiting restrictions in Abbey Street and High Street, Bangor is now in place; and (ii) if not, to outline when he expects it to be in operation.

(AQW 2749/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following amendment to the streetscape on the main shopping areas in Bangor by the new Public Realm works, amendments have been necessary to the legislation for the parking and waiting restrictions on Abbey Street, High Street, Bridge Street and Main Street, Bangor, which has resulted in enforcement being suspended until the new legislation is made.

- (i) The Traffic Regulation Order for the necessary amendments to the parking and waiting legislation has now been ratified by the Assembly's Infrastructure Committee. The Order can now be made thereby allowing enforcement to recommence.
- (ii) It is the intention to allow a period of warning to advise motorists of the recommencement of enforcement with penalty notices being issued to offenders from mid October onwards.

Mr Chambers asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) he has any plans to increase on street parking duration in Bangor from one hour to two hours; and (ii) such an increase be subject to public consultation.

(AQW 2750/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) My Department has no current proposals to increase the current one hour waiting time restriction on the main shopping streets in Bangor. However if local representatives, Traders, Chamber of Trade and local Council consider there would be merit in increasing this time to two hour duration with no return within one hour, then this can be considered.
- (ii) As part of the legislative process, consultation will have to be undertaken, which offers the opportunity for those opposed to change to make their views known and all comments will be evaluated before any such changes would be implemented.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the role driver stress plays in his departmental policy when considering upgrading road infrastructure.

(AQW 2760/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: When considering the upgrade of road infrastructure my Department develops a preferred option which seeks to achieve an optimal balance between a range of criteria including safety, accessibility, integration, environment and economy. Driver stress is an important consideration as it is a risk to road safety.

Research has identified a number of factors which contribute to driver stress, including frustration due to traffic congestion, fear due to poor road geometry and confusion due to inadequate road signage.

My Department is progressing a comprehensive programme of upgrade projects to improve journey times, journey time reliability and road safety on our road network. Each of these schemes is designed in accordance with U.K. standards to ensure that routes are clearly signed, junctions are appropriately spaced, overtaking opportunities are provided and road alignment is consistent with the class of road; all factors which contribute to lessening driver stress.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail his Department's most recent cost estimate for the upgrade of the A6.

(AQW 2761/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The A6 is one of the Executive's Flagship projects. My Department is currently progressing two separate projects on the A6 route; the Randalstown to Castledawson and Derry to Dungiven. Both of these projects will significantly improve connectivity between Derry and Belfast and contribute to enhancing the economy of the Northwest.

I am pleased to advise that the Department of Finance approved estimate for A6 Randalstown to Castledawson scheme is in the region of £160 million, within a business case estimate range of £150m - £170m.

The scheme is projected to deliver a Benefit to Cost ratio of approximately 2.3, meaning every £1 of project cost should deliver £2.30 of public, business and user benefit, through improved journey times, accident savings and motoring efficiencies.

Work is underway to determine the extent of the A6 Derry to Dungiven Dualling scheme that can be delivered within the 2015 Budget Statement allocations, with priority being given to commencing construction with a bypass of Dungiven and progressing westwards towards Drumahoe. The cost range for the whole scheme, between Derry and Dungiven, is £390 million to £420 million, although a review of this is currently being carried out.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline how his Department will ensure Clady is protected from flooding this winter.

(AQW 2762/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above 3 questions as they are all related to Clady and respond as follows:

- Following the significant flooding in 2015 a comprehensive post flood investigation was completed by Rivers Agency and emergency works were undertaken to restore the previous level of protection. These works included the repair of breaches in the existing flood defences and the provision of temporary defences, in the form of 2 tonne sandbags, on Donnygowan Burn.
- Maintenance work to the NI portion of the Finn river (the border with ROI is the middle of the river) to improve the cross-sectional area of the channel downstream of Clady bridge to accommodate increased flows has been completed. Meetings have also taken place with the Office of Public Works and Donegal Council to discuss flooding and maintenance issues on Border Rivers including the River Finn.
- At the June meeting of the Drainage Council, the lower section of the Donnygowan Burn running through the village was designated, this allowed the Department to carry out maintenance to this watercourse and it will now be routinely inspected for impediments to flow in the future. We also remove a buildup of material from the confluence of the Finn River.
- A pre-feasibility study on flood defences for Clady Village has been completed and has recently been included on the Agency's Capital Works Prioritisation Programme. The scheme would include a more permanent solution for

the Donnygowan Burn, which may require culverting and the construction of flood walls. We now plan to carry out a feasibility study and if a cost beneficial scheme is identified, the scheme will then progress to detailed design. Subject to these procedures, I would hope that the scheme would progress to the construction stage within the next 4 – 5 years, although I must stress that this is subject to funding being available and as you are aware, there is continued pressure on public expenditure.

- DfI Rivers are in the process of installing a high water level Alert station at Clady Village and this is planned to be completed and operational by the end of 2016. The provision of a sandbag store for use by home and business owners is also being explored with the community group.
- You may also be interested to know that four applications for the Home Owner Flood Protection Grant Scheme have been submitted by residents in Clady and these have all been approved. This is grant scheme which will enable these people to modify their homes to reduce the likelihood of flood water entering the property.

I hope that all this activity demonstrates that my Department is doing all that it can to manage the risk of flooding to the village of Clady.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what action his Department has taken to address flood risks in Clady over the last nine months.

(AQW 2763/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above 3 questions as they are all related to Clady and respond as follows:

- Following the significant flooding in 2015 a comprehensive post flood investigation was completed by Rivers Agency and emergency works were undertaken to restore the previous level of protection. These works included the repair of breaches in the existing flood defences and the provision of temporary defences, in the form of 2 tonne sandbags, on Donnygowan Burn.
- Maintenance work to the NI portion of the Finn river (the border with ROI is the middle of the river) to improve the cross-sectional area of the channel downstream of Clady bridge to accommodate increased flows has been completed. Meetings have also taken place with the Office of Public Works and Donegal Council to discuss flooding and maintenance issues on Border Rivers including the River Finn.
- At the June meeting of the Drainage Council, the lower section of the Donnygowan Burn running through the village was designated, this allowed the Department to carry out maintenance to this watercourse and it will now be routinely inspected for impediments to flow in the future. We also remove a buildup of material from the confluence of the Finn River.
- A pre-feasibility study on flood defences for Clady Village has been completed and has recently been included on the Agency's Capital Works Prioritisation Programme. The scheme would include a more permanent solution for the Donnygowan Burn, which may require culverting and the construction of flood walls. We now plan to carry out a feasibility study and if a cost beneficial scheme is identified, the scheme will then progress to detailed design. Subject to these procedures, I would hope that the scheme would progress to the construction stage within the next 4 – 5 years, although I must stress that this is subject to funding being available and as you are aware, there is continued pressure on public expenditure.
- DfI Rivers are in the process of installing a high water level Alert station at Clady Village and this is planned to be completed and operational by the end of 2016. The provision of a sandbag store for use by home and business owners is also being explored with the community group.
- You may also be interested to know that four applications for the Home Owner Flood Protection Grant Scheme have been submitted by residents in Clady and these have all been approved. This is grant scheme which will enable these people to modify their homes to reduce the likelihood of flood water entering the property.

I hope that all this activity demonstrates that my Department is doing all that it can to manage the risk of flooding to the village of Clady.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the need to upgrade flood protection measures in Clady.

(AQW 2764/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have grouped the above 3 questions as they are all related to Clady and respond as follows:

- Following the significant flooding in 2015 a comprehensive post flood investigation was completed by Rivers Agency and emergency works were undertaken to restore the previous level of protection. These works included the repair of breaches in the existing flood defences and the provision of temporary defences, in the form of 2 tonne sandbags, on Donnygowan Burn.
- Maintenance work to the NI portion of the Finn river (the border with ROI is the middle of the river) to improve the cross-sectional area of the channel downstream of Clady bridge to accommodate increased flows has been completed. Meetings have also taken place with the Office of Public Works and Donegal Council to discuss flooding and maintenance issues on Border Rivers including the River Finn.
- At the June meeting of the Drainage Council, the lower section of the Donnygowan Burn running through the village was designated, this allowed the Department to carry out maintenance to this watercourse and it will now be routinely

inspected for impediments to flow in the future. We also remove a buildup of material from the confluence of the Finn River.

- A pre-feasibility study on flood defences for Clady Village has been completed and has recently been included on the Agency's Capital Works Prioritisation Programme. The scheme would include a more permanent solution for the Donnygowan Burn, which may require culverting and the construction of flood walls. We now plan to carry out a feasibility study and if a cost beneficial scheme is identified, the scheme will then progress to detailed design. Subject to these procedures, I would hope that the scheme would progress to the construction stage within the next 4 – 5 years, although I must stress that this is subject to funding being available and as you are aware, there is continued pressure on public expenditure.
- DfI Rivers are in the process of installing a high water level Alert station at Clady Village and this is planned to be completed and operational by the end of 2016. The provision of a sandbag store for use by home and business owners is also being explored with the community group.
- You may also be interested to know that four applications for the Home Owner Flood Protection Grant Scheme have been submitted by residents in Clady and these have all been approved. This is grant scheme which will enable these people to modify their homes to reduce the likelihood of flood water entering the property.

I hope that all this activity demonstrates that my Department is doing all that it can to manage the risk of flooding to the village of Clady.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 1565/11-16, (i) whether he is aware of taxis being passed with old meters since 31 May 2016; and (ii) how he is ensuring that new regulations are upheld.

(AQW 2780/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Taxis (Taximeters, Devices and Maximum Fares) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 came into effect from 31 May 2016. These regulations provide for all Class A and Class B taxis to have an approved taximeter and printer fitted, tested and sealed.

However, following representations from the taxi industry, concerned about the lead-in time for the new requirements, it was agreed that until 1 October 2016 a taxi could be licensed in advance of a taximeter test being conducted. As a consequence, it is possible that a taxi fitted with an old unapproved taximeter would not fail the taxi licence test when presented at a Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) test centre.

The DVA advises the presenters of Class A and Class B taxis of the requirement to have an approved taximeter fitted, tested and sealed. I am currently considering options to deal with a number of Taximeter issues.

From the 1 October 2016, all Class A and Class B taxis will be required to have an approved taximeter and printer fitted, tested and sealed before applying for a taxi licence inspection. During the taxi licence inspection, the taximeter will be checked to ensure continued compliance with the new Regulations.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the reason for the delay in spraying weeds in the Beechfield Estate area, Bangor.

(AQW 2782/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that the delay in implementing a programme of weed spraying in these areas was due to contractual issues.

However I am pleased to confirm that a programme of chemical weed treatment has been ongoing in the North Down and Ards Borough Council area within the past few weeks.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many parking tickets have been issued in (i) Banbridge; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Lurgan over the last year.

(AQW 2783/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: For the period 01/04/2015 – 31/03/2016 the Penalty Charge Notices issued on streets and in car parks were as follows:

		On-streets	Car parks
(i)	Banbridge	698	630
(ii)	Portadown	2143	1714
(iii)	Lurgan	1016	507

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail how much has been raised from parking tickets in the last year; and (ii) to outline where has this been invested.

(AQW 2785/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) The amount raised from parking Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) for period 1/4/2015 to 31/3/2016 was £4,420,169.
- (ii) The Budget my Department receives from the Department of Finance to provide its services is allocated on a net expenditure basis. This means the budget allocated is reduced by the income my Department expects to receive. Therefore the revenue received from parking PCNs is required to finance the services my Department provides. Any surplus revenue received is returned to the Department of Finance who may make this available for allocation to other Departments.

Mr McGrath asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the programme for the spraying of weeds in the (i) Downpatrick area; and (ii) Newcastle area in each of the last three years.

(AQW 2810/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- **2014** – There were two weed control treatments during the weed growing season in 2014. The first treatment was carried out in early June with the second follow-up treatment in late August and early September.
- **2015** – Due to cut-backs the Department for Regional Development carried out no routine weed-control treatment in the summer of 2015. However, weed-control treatment was carried out in Newcastle and the surrounding area in advance of the Irish Open Golf Tournament which started on 28 May 2105.
- **2016** – Weed-control treatment was carried out in Newcastle on 29th and 30th August 2016 and a treatment is currently being carried out within Downpatrick.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the criteria that roads and streets must meet to qualify for the winter services of (i) gritting; and (ii) the installation of sandboxes.

(AQW 2812/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: TransportNI targets the resources available for winter service on the busier main traffic routes. The criteria for inclusion of roads and streets on the winter service gritting schedule are as follows:

- (i) all Motorways and Trunk roads;
- (ii) main through routes that carry more than 1,500 vehicles per day;
- (iii) small settlements containing 100 dwellings or more are provided with a salted link to the nearest part of the existing salted network; and
- (iv) other busy through routes with special difficulties, that carry more than 1,000 vehicles per day, are considered. Such difficulties include the severity, frequency and extent of gradients, frequency of bends, the height above sea level, railway level crossings on the road and abnormally high junction frequencies.

In relation to the fourth category, consideration is given to the availability of alternative or parallel routes that are on the treated network. Where such parallel or alternative routes are available, the routes qualifying under this criteria may not necessarily be salted.

The current policy ensures that the salted network equates to around 28% of all roads, carrying around 80% of daily traffic flow in the north.

Salt bins may be provided for use by the public, on a self-help basis on roads which do not qualify for inclusion on the gritting schedule, providing the necessary criteria are met.

- The location in question is on the publically maintained road network;
- the gradient of the road in question exceeds 5%;
- no reasonable alternative route is available; and
- the subject road attains a minimum overall score, derived using a specific formula, where points are awarded depending on road geometry, residential usage, community welfare and commercial usage.

Salt bins are provided to schools that are regularly affected by severe wintry weather.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the findings of the survey conducted by Transport NI about traffic islands on Glen Road, Derry.

(AQW 2833/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My officials have revisited Glen Road, Derry and investigated the possibility of relocating the traffic islands. It has not, however, been possible to identify suitable alternative locations for the traffic islands yet maintain the integrity of the overall design objective of the scheme. This is due mainly to constraints associated with the existing layout of the road such as proximity of side roads and private entrances.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) to detail how many organisations and arm's-length bodies within his departmental remit offer recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff; and (ii) to outline how an established recruitment agency is considered.

(AQW 2846/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has not directly offered any recruitment agencies the opportunity to become the preferred providers of staff. With regard to recruitment practice for Arms length bodies:

- (i) NI Water has currently one recruitment agency in place; Translink over the past twelve months has used nine recruitment agencies.
- (ii) Requirements for temporary workers for my Department are sourced from recruitment agencies listed in existing Central Procurement Directorate contracts, namely, the NICS Supply of Temporary/Short Term Workers and the NICS Temporary Personnel Placement Services (Accountancy and Internal Audit). Providers under these contracts were appointed by Central Procurement Directorate following tender exercises carried out in accordance with established public procurement policies.

In relation to Northern Ireland Water (NIW), the appointment of recruitment agencies is subject to the company's Procurement of Goods and Services Procedures. All procurement projects comply with legislative and governance requirements, are conducted in a fair and transparent manner and provide value for money. NIW's current provider was appointed following a tender exercise in compliance with these procedures.

Translink operates a procurement policy of regularly testing the recruitment agency market when it wishes to make appointments. It does not have a policy of working with a preferred supplier. Appointments can cover roles ranging from general administrative duties to specialised transport and railway infrastructure engineering roles. In the past twelve months Translink has used the services of nine recruitment agencies.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the reasons for the delay, in relation to the initially published proposals, in implementing the new Belfast Rapid Transit system from Belfast city centre to Finaghy Road North.

(AQW 2850/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In 2015 the operational date for the Belfast Rapid Transit (BRT) system was revised from 2017 to September 2018. The implementation of the BRT system is not only dependent on the completion of the BRT road infrastructure and procurement of vehicles, but also on the delivery of a number of significant interdependent projects. These include:

- Translink's Ticketing Replacement project – which is required to be in place to provide off-board ticketing for BRT; and
- Translink's Duncrue Depot project – which will house and maintain approximately 100 buses, including the new fleet of BRT vehicles.

In 2015, due to budgetary uncertainty, it became clear that it would not be possible to deliver all the elements to enable BRT to become operational in 2017. It was therefore decided to revise the operational date to September 2018. This revised operational date was assessed as achievable by an independent external Project Assessment Review.

Implementation of the first phase of BRT, which will connect East Belfast, West Belfast and Titanic Quarter via the city centre, is progressing well and is on schedule for the commencement of services in September 2018.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there is any intention to vest land to facilitate the Compressed Air Energy Storage plant proposed for Islandmagee.

(AQW 2859/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has powers to make vesting order subject to Article 113 of The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 in relation to roads operations only.

There is no intention to vest land for this project.

Ms Bradshaw asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the current proposed timescale for the commencement of construction of the upgraded M2/M3/A12 York Street Interchange.

(AQW 2881/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The decision to leave the EU has led to financial uncertainty and has delayed my plans to release the Public Inquiry Inspectors' Report and the Departmental Statement which would have been a precursor to the appointment of a contractor and the delivery of the scheme.

I plan to make an announcement with regard to the Public Inquiry within the next few weeks and this will inform the progress towards construction for this project.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline when road resurfacing will start at (i) Bailies Terrace; (ii) Bailie Gardens and; (iii) Bailie Park, the Cotton, Bangor.

(AQW 2884/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I can advise the Member that preparatory works commenced within the past week (w/c 5 September 2016) and carriageway resurfacing will follow the completion of this work.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the ticket revenue for the last financial year for Northern Ireland Railways.

(AQW 2885/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Ticket revenue (including reimbursement for Concessionary Fares) for the last financial year (2015/16) for Northern Ireland Railways was £44.99m.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost of running Northern Ireland Railways for the last financial year.

(AQW 2886/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The cost of running Northern Ireland Railways for the last financial year (2015/16) was £67.7m. A full set of annual accounts is available.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans to upgrade the transport links from George Best City Airport.

(AQW 2887/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I have started preparations for the development of a new Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan. The plan will consider the roles that private cars, trains, buses and taxis can play in connecting George Best Belfast City Airport and Belfast International Airport.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the new rail links being considering by his Department

(AQW 2888/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The need to enhance connectivity with a particular focus on increasing the numbers using public transport is a key outcome within the Executive's draft Programme for Government. To support this, my immediate priority is to maintain and improve capacity on the existing network.

I am considering undertaking feasibility studies into possible extensions of the rail network within the period of this mandate subject to the necessary funding being available.

Mr E McCann asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline why the plaque unveiled by Queen Elizabeth during her visit on 28 January 2016 when opening the new platform at Bellarena train station was removed within 24 hours.

(AQW 2907/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Translink has advised that, because the halt at Bellarena is unmanned, it was concerned about the safety of the plaque and the possibility that it could be vandalised. Translink is currently looking at options to minimise this risk.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how many road traffic accidents have occurred on the Clooney Road/Maydown Dual Carriageway, Derry in the last 3 years.

(AQW 2915/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: On a nine kilometre stretch of carriageway from the Caw Roundabout to the Longfield Roundabout on the Clooney Road/Maydown dual carriageway there have been a total of 104 road traffic collisions between 01 April 2013 and 31 March 2016. Information in relation to traffic collisions is made available to TransportNI by PSNI Traffic Branch. There is a lag in provision of this information but we are aware that, between 01 April 2016 and 30 June 2016, there have been a further five reported road traffic collisions.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action his Department is taking or will take to ensure the authenticity of all taxi meters.

(AQW 2923/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department ensures the authenticity of all taximeters through a rigorous approval and testing process. Taximeter manufacturers must supply the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) with documented evidence relating to the certification of each make and model of taximeter, and a legislatively compliant fare charging programme, before their taximeter will be considered for approval. DVA inspect this information and then carry out a detailed physical examination of a sample make and model of each taximeter to verify the identity of the certified taximeter. DVA also carry out an on road calibration check of the taximeter fare programme. When a taximeter and its fare programme are approved, the related details are published on the NIDirect website as the Approved Taximeter and Printer List.

Only taxis with an approved taximeter installed will be accepted for taximeter testing and sealing by DVA examiners. Part of the testing and sealing process requires the vehicle examiner to identify the approved taximeter and fare programme before conducting the related on road calibration check. When the vehicle examiner is satisfied that the taximeter fully complies with

the requirements, the taximeter and its fare programming ports are sealed. The seals provide evidence of the authenticity of the taximeter.

As the taximeter manufacturer must apply directly to DVA for approval of their taximeter, and all subsequent taximeter tests include confirmation of the fitment of an approved taximeter, DVA can ensure that all taxis that have been subject to the taximeter test are fitted with a taximeter from an approved and authorised source.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action his Department is taking to ensure all taxi meters fitted are from authorised sources.

(AQW 2924/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department ensures the authenticity of all taximeters through a rigorous approval and testing process. Taximeter manufacturers must supply the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) with documented evidence relating to the certification of each make and model of taximeter, and a legislatively compliant fare charging programme, before their taximeter will be considered for approval. DVA inspect this information and then carry out a detailed physical examination of a sample make and model of each taximeter to verify the identity of the certified taximeter. DVA also carry out an on road calibration check of the taximeter fare programme. When a taximeter and its fare programme are approved, the related details are published on the NIDirect website as the Approved Taximeter and Printer List.

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Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the sanctions in place for the use of unauthorised taxi meter keys.

(AQW 2925/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no statutory powers to control the issue or use of taximeter programme keys and, therefore, has no sanctions in place.

However, the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) carry's out roadside enforcement checks on Class A and Class B taxis to ensure that taximeters are properly fitted, tested and sealed in compliance with the taximeter regulations. Where DVA detect a non-compliant taximeter, which may include the use of an unauthorised taximeter programme, enforcement officers will pursue fixed penalty or prosecution action.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what action his Department is taking to track down any unauthorised taxi meter keys.

(AQW 2926/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has no statutory powers to control the issue or use of taximeter programme keys and, therefore, has no sanctions in place.

However, the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) carry's out roadside enforcement checks on Class A and Class B taxis to ensure that taximeters are properly fitted, tested and sealed in compliance with the taximeter regulations. Where DVA detect a non-compliant taximeter, which may include the use of an unauthorised taximeter programme, enforcement officers will pursue fixed penalty or prosecution action.

Mr McElduff asked the Minister for Infrastructure, following the original developer going into administration, whether his Department will work urgently with NI Water and TransportNI to ensure that all necessary works are carried out as soon as possible to adopt the sewers and roads at Shergrim Grove, Omagh.

(AQW 2927/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Officials from TransportNI have been liaising with NI Water to address the remedial works required to allow adoption of the sewers and roads within this development.

NI Water has advised that it is committed to finding a solution to the unadopted sewers within the development. It has carried out an examination of the development's drainage system which includes cleansing by pressure jetting and a CCTV and manhole inspection. These works have identified significant defects within the sewer network.

The road related defects within the development are of a minor nature and largely require the laying of the final surface. The timing of completion of the road works is dependent on the sewerage infrastructure below the road being rectified first. I have asked officials to continue to work closely with NI Water to see if a solution to these issues can be achieved on behalf the residents.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail how his Department will be marking the campaign day known as Project EDWARD – European Day Without A Road Death.

(AQW 2954/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: European Day Without A Road Death, known as Project EDWARD, will take place on Wednesday 21 September 2016. The initiative has been organised by TISPOL, the Traffic Police network in Europe, and its aim is that no-one dies on the roads of Europe on Wednesday 21 September.

As part of the initiative, TISPOL is encouraging road user to pledge to be a better, safer driver.

My Department supports positive road safety initiatives and as such will be supporting Project Edward during the week of the initiative, including the 21 September.

My officials have been working with road safety partners and will be actively promoting the initiative across my Department's road safety social media channels, Share the Road to Zero in the lead up to and including the 21 September.

It is also worth noting that my Department has its own road safety pledge at sharetheroadtozero.com where all road users are encouraged to commit to adopting positive road user behaviours, whether as a driver, passenger, pedestrian, cyclist, motorcyclist or horse rider. By committing to this pledge, road users here receive road safety advice all year round via a weekly email and on a daily basis on Facebook and Twitter should they wish to follow on social media.

Road safety is a continuous challenge and I will continue to work with our road safety partners and stakeholders to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure for his assessment of the need for a moratorium on potential developments likely to be affected by coastal erosion.

(AQW 2956/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The susceptibility of land to coastal erosion is a material consideration (where relevant) in determining planning applications. Current strategic planning policy contained in the Department's Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) therefore clearly states that development will not be permitted in areas of the coast known to be at risk from flooding, coastal erosion, or land instability and this maintains the general policy approach as per the provisions of A Planning Strategy for Rural Northern Ireland, that has been in place since 1993. It also provides that councils can identify areas known to be at risk from coastal erosion and flooding in their local development plans where new development should not be permitted.

Whilst I am satisfied that the current policy framework referred to above provides an appropriate level of direction for the planning system (without the need for a moratorium on development), I also recognise the need for a more strategic approach to the wider issues surrounding coastal management and coastal erosion.

You will be aware I have agreed to consider this issue jointly with the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Michelle McIlveen. We will continue to work together to assess what actions need to be taken in relation to a range of coastal management matters, including consideration of the role of the planning system going forward.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans to secure the York Street interchange project following the withdrawal of European Union funding.

(AQW 2959/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I remain committed to doing all that I can to deliver York Street and other key projects within the current financial context, working with the Finance Minister and other Executive colleagues. I have also asked my officials to engage fully with the European Commission and to continue to pursue every opportunity to draw down EU funds for the benefit of the north.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the tender process by which Parkeon was awarded the contract to design and deliver a new ticketing system for public transport as announced on 4 September 2016.

(AQW 2963/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The requirement for the ticketing system for public transport was advertised in the Official Journal of the European Union ref 2015S25-042289 in February 2015 under the EU negotiated procedure.

Applications were received from five potential suppliers. All five applicants passed the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire stage and were invited to tender.

Two complete and compliant tender submissions were received via 'eTendersNI' and were evaluated in detail by Translink.

Parkeon were awarded the contract as they provided the most economically advantageous tender. There have been no objections raised.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether there are any plans to give learner drivers the option to request a different examiner if they had been previously failed by that examiner in an earlier test.

(AQW 2976/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Public confidence in the driving test as an impartial road safety measure is based on the knowledge that it is conducted to a high standard by honest, trustworthy, professional driving examiners.

Well prepared candidates are more likely to pass their test, irrespective of the driving examiner. Research has shown that learners who pass their driving test have had, on average, 45 hours of professional training combined with 22 hours of private practice.

When booking a driving test, candidates can select their preferred date, time and driving test centre, but cannot choose their driving examiner. Each day the Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) computer system randomly selects which candidates a driving examiner will be allocated to test that day. To allow driving examiners or candidates to choose who they test or who tests them would seriously erode public confidence in the impartiality of the driving test. I, therefore, have no plans to give driving test candidates the option of choosing their driving examiner.

If a driving test candidate is unhappy about how their driving test was conducted, the DVA has a complaints procedure in place to address any issues or concerns they may raise.

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether his Department has any plans to review the theory test element of the driving test, including its success.

(AQW 2978/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Road Traffic (Amendment) Act (NI) 2016 will, amongst other things, introduce Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) from May 2019.

Part of the work to implement GDL will include a review of the theory test element of the driving test, which I plan to consult on in February 2017. I aim to publish the result of the consultation in the summer 2017.

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether he will consider the provision of a bus station/depot within the Lurgan area.

(AQW 2982/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are currently no plans for a bus station in Lurgan. Translink does have a customer-facing facility in the town which is available at the train station on William Street.

Bus passengers currently avail of on-street bus stop/shelter facilities in the centre of the town with local buses being based in the main depot for Craigavon at Highfield Road. This facility provides buses to operate services from both Portadown and Lurgan.

My Department is investing in public transport in the Craigavon area. In July 2013, Portadown Train Station was officially opened following the completion of a £3.6 million redevelopment project.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the timeline for conclusion and publication of the Lough Neagh flooding report.

(AQW 3024/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The review of the 2015/16 winter floods, led by Alan Strong who is a well respected independent civil engineer, is well advanced. The review includes consideration of the current management regime to control water levels for Lough Neagh. This review has been very comprehensive through the evidence gathering stage. Alan has met and corresponded with residents and businesses to hear their concerns and the effect the flooding has had on their lives.

It is expected that a number of recommendations may be made to identify ways in which we can be even better prepared for future flooding emergencies.

It is my understanding that the report will be published in late autumn 2016.

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Infrastructure outline his plans to review and update the Taxis Act.

(AQW 3025/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Following my meeting on the 3 August 2016 with a new taxi group established in the north, I made clear my intention to deal as quickly as possible with this legacy issue. It is vital that there is clarity for both consumers and those in the taxi industry on the way forward and my decision to instruct my officials to commence work immediately on a review demonstrates my commitment to finally put in place a taxi industry that fully meets the needs of the consumer here.

I have also been aware that rumours are being spread amongst taxi operators and drivers that the requirement to have an approved meter and printer is being scrapped. Let me reiterate that this is not the case and the legislative requirement to have an approved meter and printer installed in all Class A and Class B taxis remains in place. My officials have also commenced work to set up a Taxi Forum, which will include statutory bodies, stakeholders from across the taxi industry and consumer groups. This group will help inform the content of the review and how it will be progressed.

I intend to ensure that at the end of the review process I will put in place a taxi industry which fully meets the needs of local people and those that visit this part of Ireland.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the cost to (i) PSV a taxi; and (ii) PSV a 49+ seater bus.
(AQW 3031/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The cost of a taxi PSV test is £138.50.

The cost of a PSV test for a 49+ seater bus without seatbelts is £90.50 and £127.00 with seatbelts.

Mr Robinson asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether retired or former members of staff from his Department are permitted to start a business in a sphere for which they were once responsible for regulating, overseeing or designing legislation.
(AQW 3033/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The NICS HR Handbook, Standards of Conduct (Section 6.01, Annex 4), contain rules specifically on the Acceptance of Outside Business Appointments, Employment or Self-Employment by Civil Servants after leaving the NI Civil Service. The rules apply to all Civil Servants who propose to take up employment or self-employment during a period of up to two years after their last day of paid service.

Retired or former officers are permitted to accept employment including self employment subject to the conditions of these rules.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, apart from ticket sales and departmental funding, to outline any other revenue streams for Northern Ireland Railways, .
(AQW 3043/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: Other Revenue streams for Northern Ireland Railways are:

- Advertising income
- Income from in-station activities including:
 - Rental income
 - Bank service tills
 - Vending machine commission
 - Photo booths
 - Telecoms site rental

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what was the amount spent on train maintenance over the last financial year by Northern Ireland Railways.
(AQW 3046/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: In the last financial year (2015/16) Northern Ireland Railways spent £12.7m on train maintenance (including train cleaning) of which £7.8m was internal labour.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure whether (i) all currently (a) issued and (b) active taxi-operator licences have been issued to operators that are fully compliant with all departmental regulations and criteria, without exception; and (ii) regular checks are carried out with both operators and drivers to ensure full compliance.
(AQW 3052/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A Taxi Operator Licence is only granted to an applicant when all application requirements have been met. An operator licence is granted subject to the following conditions. A Licensed Taxi Operator must:

- comply with all regulatory requirements contained within the Taxis Act (NI) 2008 and the Taxi Operators Licensing Regulations 2012;
- comply with relevant health and safety legislation;
- continue to comply with the 'fit and proper' criteria and comply with the instructions as listed in the Taxi Operator Handbook.

Driver & Vehicle Agency (DVA) enforcement officers conduct a wide range of checks on vehicles, drivers and operators, both at the roadside and at commercial premises, to ensure compliance with the regulations. DVA adopts a risk based approach to enforcement and operational programmes are developed to ensure resources are targeted against the most non-compliant operators and drivers.

Where there is clear evidence that an operator is failing to take the necessary steps to meet legal requirements, appropriate enforcement and/or regulatory action is taken.

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on traffic calming measures programmed for Blackskull.
(AQW 3062/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: You will be aware that my Department receives many requests for inclusion of works on the Network Development Programme. Demand greatly exceeds the resources available and prioritisation of viable schemes is required to ensure that best value for public money is achieved.

I can advise that Blackskull has been assessed but due to competing priorities it is not included in a work programme at this time.

Transport NI's annual report is presented to local councils normally in the spring. The report is specific to each council area and will outline the Network Development programme for the current year as well as detailing works undertaken in the previous year.

My Department will retain your request for consideration on future works programmes.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline what discussions will take place within Translink to ensure rail and bus timetables are co-ordinated so that buses leave provincial stations after trains have arrived and not before in order to develop a truly integrated passenger transport system.

(AQW 3069/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There have been no direct discussions with Translink in regards to ensuring that rail and bus timetable are co-ordinated but my Department would expect this to happen to facilitate customers as far as possible.

Translink have confirmed that both train and bus timetables are currently co-ordinated to maximise connection opportunities between both services with the overall aim to reducing transfer times for passengers. Clearly due to the volume of bus services relative to rail services, and their reliance on the traffic network, there will always be challenges in full co-ordination.

In times of bus or rail disruption, both bus and rail staff liaise to ensure, where possible, all connections are met.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the most recent timeline for the completion of the A5 project.
(AQW 3090/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: A Public Inquiry into the proposed scheme is scheduled to open on 4 October 2016. My Department has appointed the Planning Appeals Commission (PAC) as the independent Inspector to administer the Inquiry. The Inspector's Report is expected around May 2017.

My Department will consider the recommendations of the Report in detail before I make a decision on whether to proceed with the scheme and make the necessary statutory Orders (Direction Order, Vesting Order and Stopping-Up Order).

Subject to the successful completion of statutory procedures, the budget allocation of £229m will enable construction of Phase 1A (Newbuildings and Strabane) to commence in late 2017 with an estimated completion date of late 2019. It would also suggest that construction of the south of Omagh to Ballygawley section (Phase 1B) could commence in the latter part of the five year budget period. This however would require a commitment to significant expenditure beyond 2020/21.

I am currently reviewing funding scenarios with officials to explore how additional phases of the A5 scheme could be delivered.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline (i) how he intends to secure the future of the Foyle Ferry Service; and (ii) what changes he intends to propose to legislation to allow funding for the development of this service.

(AQW 3098/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: My Department has had no involvement in either the establishment of this service or its operation.

Legislatively, my Department holds no statutory powers in relation to ferry services operating outside the North. Provision of support for services which operate entirely within the jurisdiction of the North (i.e. Strangford-Portaferry and Ballycastle-Rathlin) is recognised within and delivered through The Roads (NI) Order 1993. This legislation does not extend to the provision of support for ferry services operating beyond this jurisdictional limit.

Separately, existing harbours legislation does not allow the grant-aiding of shipping; which is a reserved matter.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 52344/11-16, to outline why a licence was issued to this taxi-operator on condition that compliance terms and regulations were met as opposed to a determination in advance that all said compliance terms and regulations were met before any taxi would be permitted to operate.

(AQW 3124/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The application process is in place to establish the repute of the applicant(s) and the suitability of any operating centre. As an applicant cannot provide a taxi service before a licence is granted it is not possible to establish compliance with all the regulations as part of the application process.

In all cases where a Taxi Operator Licence is granted, it is granted on condition that the legislative requirements are to be met.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail the number and type of new buses ordered by his Department and Translink during; (i) 2014/2015; (ii) 2015/2016; and (iii) 2016/2017.

(AQW 3129/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The number and type of new buses ordered by Translink during; (i) 2014/2015; (ii) 2015/2016; and (iii) 2016/2017 are as follows:

2014/15

- 12 Double Deck Goldline Coaches

2015/16

- None

2016/17

- 13 Double Decks (10 Ulsterbus, 3 Metro)

Project EDWARD: Discussions with PSNI

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail what discussions his Department has held with the PSNI in regards to the campaign day known as Project EDWARD – European Day Without A Road Death.

(AQW 3134/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: European Day Without A Road Death, known as Project EDWARD, will take place on Wednesday 21 September 2016. The initiative has been organised by TISPOL, the Traffic Police network in Europe, and its aim is that no-one dies on the roads of Europe on Wednesday 21 September.

As part of the initiative, TISPOL is encouraging road user to pledge to be a better, safer driver.

My Department supports positive road safety initiatives and as such will be supporting Project Edward during the week of the initiative, including the 21 September.

My officials have been working with PSNI road safety partners and will be actively promoting the initiative across my Department's road safety social media channels, Share the Road to Zero in the lead up to and including the 21 September.

It is also worth noting that my Department has its own road safety pledge at sharetheroadtozero.com where all road users are encouraged to commit to adopting positive road user behaviours, whether as a driver, passenger, pedestrian, cyclist, motorcyclist or horse rider. By committing to this pledge, road users here receive road safety advice all year round via a weekly email and on a daily basis on Facebook and Twitter should they wish to follow on social media.

Road safety is a continuous challenge and I will continue to work with our road safety partners and stakeholders to work towards reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure to detail (i) how many trains are currently surplus to demand and are mothballed by Northern Ireland Railways; and (ii) any costs to maintain them.

(AQW 3141/16-21)

Mr Hazzard:

- (i) NI Railways fully utilise all trains within its passenger fleet and currently has no trains that are surplus to demand or mothballed.
- (ii) As no trains are mothballed there are no associated costs.

Mrs Barton asked the Minister for Infrastructure, pursuant to AQW 2178/16-21 and following the VES staffing restructure, whether all section offices and work depots will remain open to the public.

(AQW 3168/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The Department is still considering the impacts of reduced staff numbers within TransportNI and all section offices and depots currently remain open to the public.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister for Infrastructure (i) whether he will introduce a similar scheme to the one in the south of Ireland where people that are partially sighted receive free public transport and can bring a companion for free; and (ii) to detail how much this would cost.

(AQW 3315/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I am sympathetic to your call for a change to provide free travel for those who are partially sighted and for their carers similar to the one in the south of Ireland. However the position is that the concessionary fares budget remains under pressure and there is currently no provision within the budget to support any further extension of the scheme.

Given the pressures on the concessionary fares budget no work has been undertaken to cost potential extensions.

Mr McNulty asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline any studies his Department has commissioned into the electrification of the rail network.

(AQW 3383/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I recognise the efficiency and environmental benefits which a longer term move to electrification could bring. Electrification of the network will always be most cost effective when it coincides with a natural requirement for fleet replacement. I am considering undertaking a feasibility study on the enhancement of the Enterprise service within the period of this mandate, subject to the necessary funding being available. Such a study would have to be prepared in partnership with

the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and Irish Rail and would include consideration of any future Enterprise fleet being electrically powered and being the first electrified route.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Infrastructure when he anticipates the A6 road scheme will be completed.
(AQO 258/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The A6 is one of the Executive's Flagship projects. My Department is currently progressing two separate projects on the A6 route; the Randalstown to Castledawson and Derry to Dungiven. Both of these projects will significantly improve connectivity between Derry and Belfast and contribute to enhancing the economy of the Northwest.

In August I announced my intention to proceed with the £160m Randalstown to Castledawson dualling scheme and progress the making of the Vesting Order. This 14.7km scheme comprises two sections of new dual carriageway located either side of the Toome Bypass. Construction will begin in October and overall is estimated to last 3.5 years. Construction work on both sections will be carried out concurrently and under the current programme the Toome to Randalstown section will open in spring 2019, ahead of the Toome to Castledawson section which will open in spring 2020.

The 30km Derry to Dungiven scheme, which includes a 5km bypass of Dungiven, is also well advanced in terms of development. As Minister I am committed to maximising delivery of this dualling during this mandate and I am currently engaging with my officials about expediting delivery of the scheme..

In May of this year my Department appointed a consultant to assist with the procurement and delivery of this Flagship project. Work is currently underway to determine the extent of the Derry to Dungiven scheme that can be delivered within the funding allocations contained in the December 2015 Budget Statement, with priority being given to commencing construction with a bypass of Dungiven and progressing westwards towards Drumahoe.

Subject to making the statutory orders, approval of the final business case and successful procurement, it is possible that the first phase of the Derry to Dungiven scheme could commence in the latter part of 2018/19.

Mr McCartney asked the Minister for Infrastructure for an update on the transport hub in the Derry and Strabane District Council area.
(AQO 259/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: I remain fully committed to the delivery of a modern multimodal transport hub in Derry, and I am pleased to confirm that a recent application submitted by my Department for EU co-financing from the INTERREG Va programme is currently under final consideration by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).

The securing of INTERREG funding before the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn Statement on 23 November will protect the EU element of the project costs. Given the assurances by the Chancellor to guarantee funding for projects secured by the Autumn Statement, I have committed to provide the necessary levels of match funding required to assure project delivery.

I hope to receive in due course, further assurances from the Treasury that other projects which demonstrate the potential to access EU funding are similarly supported and I will be working with my Executive colleagues in this regard.

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline the reason for the delay in providing a park and ride facility at Cullybackey Railway Station.
(AQO 260/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: As the Member is aware this issue has been under discussion for some time and Translink has concerns about safety issues at the proposed location. Specifically a detailed design review and risk assessment has raised concern that additional traffic introduced by the Cullybackey Park and Ride facility, could potentially cause blocking over the automatic crossing.

This assessment, combined with increased crossing incidents, has led Translink to conclude that the level crossing at Cullybackey Station should be upgraded, before the Park and Ride project is commissioned. I am sure you will agree safety is paramount. The crossing upgrade involves significant railway signalling alteration works which could take some time to complete.

A site visit to Cullybackey level crossing has been conducted and Translink has received the draft report of the independent safety assessment carried out to assess the likely impact of opening a new Park & Ride adjacent to Cullybackey Level Crossing. The report is positive and Translink is currently developing a plan for the Cullybackey Park & Ride, to be issued by October.

I have asked Translink to keep me informed of developments and timelines.

We are about to engage with DoF about our overall Capital plans and priorities for the next 4 years. The Capital budget for 2017/18 (and beyond) is not agreed and with expected budget constraints there are many competing priorities.

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Infrastructure for the criteria used by Transport NI in deciding on the location of traffic islands.
(AQO 263/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: There are no set criteria for deciding the location of traffic islands, however there are quite a number of factors that need to be collectively considered. These factors include:

- whether there is sufficient road width to accommodate a suitably sized island while leaving sufficient carriageway width to allow vehicles to pass safely;
- whether there is a signal controlled crossing nearby;
- whether the passing traffic is prone to queuing at that location;
- whether there is sufficient available kerb-side space in the vicinity for providing a dedicated crossing point particularly in busier urban areas where the demand for parking and loading is at a premium;
- whether the island can be accommodated with other existing traffic management features such as dedicated turning lanes;
- whether there are private entrances in the location generating traffic movements that would conflict with the island;
- whether there is an existing demand from pedestrians to cross there;
- whether the island can be located away from nearby bus stops which can cause difficulties; and,
- whether it is possible to provide a crossing without the pedestrians being obscured by obstructions such as parked cars or vans on the road.

Notwithstanding the above, the most important consideration determining the location of traffic islands is the safety of pedestrians who will use the facility.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister for Infrastructure to outline his plans for free residents-only parking schemes. (AQO 264/16-21)

Mr Hazzard: The policy for the introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes was introduced in 2007 by the then Department for Regional Development.

Since that time, despite considerable effort, no schemes have been implemented due largely to a lack of local support from residents concerned.

Despite this, my Department is currently developing a number of residents' parking schemes in Belfast, Derry and Antrim.

In line with the current budgetary constraints faced by all Departments these schemes will generally be introduced on a full cost recovery basis, which will require a charge to be levied for a parking permit.

The exception to this being any scheme lying either wholly or partially in a Neighbourhood Renewal Area (as defined by the Department for Communities) which will be exempt from the permit charge.

Where a charge is levied, this has been set at £30 per resident's permit and is intended to cover the cost of the scheme design and the enforcement needed to stop others from outside the area parking there.

Department of Justice

Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Justice what steps her Department is taking to reduce attacks on churches in South Belfast. (AQW 2336/16-21)

Ms Sugden (The Minister of Justice): My Department's Community Safety Strategy aims to build safer, shared and confident communities. Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), funded by my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, play a key role in delivering on the Strategy and in enhancing community safety through partnership working at a local level.

I understand that, in recent months, two churches in the Lisburn and Castlereagh Council area were subjected to arson attacks. Lisburn and Castlereagh PCSP has been working with the local PSNI in response to these incidents and organised a meeting, attended by five local churches, which included a presentation by a PSNI Crime Prevention Officer.

One important outcome from the meeting was a PSNI commitment to organise a similar event in the autumn to promote Church Watch, and the organisation a churches forum to cover the Castlereagh and Carryduff area.

The PCSP and PSNI have also arranged several public meetings in September for the area, focusing on home and personal security crime prevention advice, along with the promotion of Neighbourhood Watch.

Mr Stalford asked the Minister of Justice how many sex offenders are registered in each constituency. (AQW 2337/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The PSNI is responsible for maintenance of the Sex Offenders Register in Northern Ireland. As such, this is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will instigate an investigation into how James White was unable to be located by Designated Risk Managers despite monitoring, notification requirements and Sexual Offences Prevention Order restrictions until his re-arrest almost a year later in Stewartstown.

(AQW 2342/16-21)

Ms Sugden: This case does not meet the criteria for a Serious Case Review in that the current charges against Mr White do not meet the serious violent offence threshold and there are no grounds to suggest that there has been a significant failure in his risk management by statutory agencies whilst on licence.

Any review of risk management of an offender, subject to statutory requirements monitored by PSNI, would be a matter for the Chief Constable.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what extension to car parking facilities has been considered and factored into the costings of current renovations at Dungannon Courthouse; and why was this not regarded a feasible expenditure when the issue was first brought to the attention of the Department.

(AQW 2343/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no current plans to undertake any extension work to the Dungannon Courthouse car parking facilities.

The decision to commence a programme of work at any Courthouse has to be considered within the business needs of that Courthouse against other competing priorities and pressures across the rest of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether a final decision has been taken to transfer Magherafelt Magistrates Court cases to Dungannon Courthouse; and if so (i) on what date was decision taken; (ii) which agencies were notified of the decision; (iii) on what date are cases to commence at Dungannon Courthouse; and (iv) whether a public statement was issued on this move.

(AQW 2344/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The decision to close Magherafelt court hearing centre was taken by my predecessor following public consultation in 2012 and ratified by him in February 2016.

The decision to close a select number of courthouses subsequent to further public consultation in 2015 is now the subject of judicial review proceedings in the High Court. Consequently it is my intention not to proceed with any court closures pending the outcome of those proceedings. In the interim Magistrates' Courts will continue to be held at Magherafelt Hearing Centre.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1478/16-21, how funding has been collectively paid to family members of murdered officers, and to officers who died in service or retired on ill-health grounds.

(AQW 2345/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Prison Service Trust provides healthcare, life planning and support services. These services are offered to their client base which includes: serving members who donate to the Trust, family members of murdered officers, and officers who died in service or retired on ill-health grounds.

This does not preclude the Trust from the provision of other services, or to persons other than those within the client group from monies other than those received by government grant, i.e. member subscriptions.

Details of how the funding is distributed are contained in the Annual Report which can be found on the Trust's website. (<http://www.pst-ni.co.uk/>)

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what provision is being made to extend car-parking facilities, and disabled parking bays, at Dungannon Courthouse to prevent congestion on the Killyman Road, reduced use of footpaths, residents being unable to access their own properties and parents being unable to collect children at the local primary school.

(AQW 2346/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no current plans to undertake any extension work to the Dungannon Courthouse car parking facilities.

The decision to commence a programme of work at any Courthouse has to be considered within the business needs of that Courthouse against other competing priorities and pressures across the rest of the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice what discussions she has had with the PSNI about the enforcement of legislation concerning quadricycles and other mini-motos.

(AQW 2351/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Following the tragic death of Valerie Armstrong in July 2016, as a result of an incident involving a scrambler in Colin Glen Park, I have had a series of meetings to understand the underlying issues.

I have been advised that the PSNI is content with its powers regarding the use of quadricycles and other such vehicles, as set out in the current raft of legislation. The main concerns are in relation to enforcement.

I have recently written to the Chief Constable and to Chris Hazzard, Minister for Infrastructure, to arrange meetings to discuss this issue further.

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Justice for an update on recruitment for the PSNI.
(AQW 2352/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Student officer intakes scheduled for September, October and November 2016 will be suspended to allow for the completion of an internal review of the Police College, following an investigation into alleged cheating by some student officers in the examination process. The College review is scheduled to conclude at the end of September and its findings, recommendations and an action plan will be shared with the Policing Board.

The PSNI anticipates that intakes of student officers will resume in December 2016, subject to the conclusion of the process outlined above. No appointments have yet been made from the 2015 recruitment process: these are now expected to commence in December 2016.

The PSNI has commissioned Deloitte to conduct an independent research project into how to recruit from groups currently under-represented in the PSNI, the outcome of which will shape the approach to the next campaign, scheduled to launch in January 2017. Again, the findings from the research will be shared with the Policing Board.

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to a charge on industry, such as mining and petroleum extraction, for the cost of policing operations.
(AQW 2358/16-21)

Ms Sugden: PSNI escort explosives in transit to various facilities throughout Northern Ireland. The purpose is to ensure both security and public safety.

In addition legislation permits the Chief Constable where he feels it necessary to supervise any blasting activity. Again such steps are to ensure public safety and the security of the explosives and commercial detonators.

My officials have had a number of discussions with both PSNI and Minerals Branch in the Department for the Economy about the potential to charge certain sites for support where their blasting requirements are far in excess of other users or where the site necessitates a higher level of cover. This remains under consideration.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Justice what is the cost to date to her Department of the legal proceedings in the (i) High Court; and (ii) Court of Appeal as a result of the case brought by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in the matter of the law on termination of pregnancy in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 2362/16-21)

Ms Sugden: To date, legal fees of £37,170 have been charged to the Department in respect of the High Court proceedings and £38,556 for the Appeal Court. The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service estimates that the proceedings have cost approximately £24,551 in staff and judicial salaries and a further £1940 for facilities.

Mr Mullan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the planned new build for Magilligan prison.
(AQW 2371/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I am committed to providing a redeveloped prison at Magilligan to enable the Northern Ireland Prison Service to deliver essential programmes to address re-offending behaviour; to meet Disability Discrimination Act standards; and to replace the existing infrastructure, which has outlived its useful life and is expensive and inefficient to staff, maintain and operate.

An outline business case for the Redevelopment of Magilligan Prison was approved by the Department of Finance (then the Department of Finance and Personnel) in January 2015.

Project Delivery is dependent on the provision of capital funding. This will be considered as part of the process of setting the next budget.

I will not be able to confirm when the rebuilding of Magilligan Prison will commence until capital funding is secured.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the announcement of the departure of the NIPS Director General Sue McAllister, whether the structures she put in place including the appointment of a team of change managers from outside Northern Ireland, are to be reviewed or ended.
(AQW 2414/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Prison Reform Programme came to a formal close in March 2016. The structures put in place to deliver the Reform Programme ended at that time.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the statutory powers of Public Protection Arrangements in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 2415/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Article 50 of the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 2008 made statutory provision for designated agencies and bodies to have a legal duty to cooperate and share information to help assess and manage the risk of serious harm to the public posed by relevant offenders.

The current Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) came into effect in October 2008 (the Order). PPANI is not a statutory body in itself but a structure that enables agencies to undertake their statutory duties for public protection and coordinate their functions with the aim of sharing information and working together to more effectively manage the risk posed by certain high risk offenders.

Ministerial guidance is issued under Article 50 of the Order to statutorily designated bodies, on the exercise of their functions which contribute to the effective risk assessment and management of the risks posed by certain sexual and violent offenders. A copy of the current guidance is available on the PPANI website at <http://www.publicprotectionni.com/uploads/pdf/guidance.pdf>

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1879/16-21, whether she will conduct a review into hostel placements of people on bail from custody or with criminal records to ensure they are released to approved hostels, that agencies involved in placements are aware of their statutory obligations to public safety and other hostel residents and that placements in non-approved hostels are halted.

(AQW 2416/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have no plans to conduct such a review. Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) works in partnership with a range of voluntary, community and statutory organisations to identify and address the accommodation needs of offenders who are subject to their statutory supervision on release.

If the offender is not subject to statutory supervision by PBNI, the matter of accommodation, including the approval of bail addresses, is the responsibility of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

The agencies involved in public protection are committed to making communities safer and to working together to ensure there is appropriate accommodation in place for offenders.

In the event of PBNI making a referral to a non-approved hostel, PBNI will share background information on the offender, including offending history, with the hostel. This information will enable hostel staff to effectively manage offenders.

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many Freedom of Information requests she has received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by her Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, her Special Adviser.

(AQW 2417/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Since 25 May 2016 my Department has received a total of 94 FOI requests. 77 of these requests have been answered and the remainder are 'live' cases.

My Special Adviser is included on a weekly circulation list of all FOI requests received by my Department.

None of the FOI requests received by my Department to date have been altered or amended at the request of my Special Adviser.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of maintaining Castleberg Barracks over the last five years.

(AQW 2434/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The PSNI has provided details on the costs of maintaining the police station in Castleberg as follows.

Year	Maintenance	Rates and utilities	Total
2011/12	£26,984	£102,853	£129,837
2012/13	£73,014	£71,264	£144,278
2013/14	£63,135	£146,680	£209,815
2014/15	£40,657	£146,475	£187,132
2015/16	£28,806	£147,446	£176,252
Total	£232,596	£614,718	£847,314

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of the effectiveness of the European Arrest Warrant.

(AQW 2473/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The European Arrest Warrant is one of a number of effective EU instruments which require to be considered in the light of the Brexit referendum. I am committed to ensuring that my officials, in conjunction with operational criminal justice organisations, consider carefully the implications of such instruments not being available to law enforcement.

As I said in the context of my IGA statement on 13 September, I am committed to retaining the European Arrest Warrant. To illustrate, in 2014 PSNI received 49 European Arrest Warrant requests, and made 11 European Arrest Warrant requests

to other EU member states. In 2015, PSNI received 80 European Arrest Warrant requests, and made 4 requests to other member states. To the end of June 2016, PSNI received European Arrest Warrant requests, with 6 outward requests made so far this year.

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) the services provided to her Department by voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations; (ii) the name of each organisation; (iii) the value of each contract; and (iv) the nature of each contract, broken down over the last three years.

(AQW 2496/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Due to the volume of information requested, it is taking longer than the designated time frame to collate an accurate answer.

I will write to you with a further update as soon as possible.

Ms Seeley asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) how many appeals were lodged with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal; (ii) what were the grounds of the appeal in each case; and (iii) in how many of these cases was the position of the Education Authority/ Education and Library Board upheld by the Tribunal, broken down by calendar year since 2013.

(AQW 2502/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The following tables provide details of the appeals lodged with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal; the grounds for appeal; and the appeal outcome including cases disposed of prior to hearing. The information is provided for each financial year. To present the information in calendar year format would require a manual review at disproportionate cost.

Table 1 - Number of appeals received by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Appeals Received	121	121	145

Table 2 - Grounds for Appeal

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Refusal to Assess (Parent)	45	43	56
Refusal to Assess (School)	22	16	27
Refusal to Statement	15	11	8
Refusal to Re-Assess (Parent)	1	1	2
Refusal to Re-Assess (School)	-	1	-
Refusal to Change School Name	7	7	3
Cease to Maintain Statement	2	3	2
Failure to Name School	1	-	-
Content of Statement – Pt 2 & 3 or both	21	33	41
Content of Statement – Pt 2,3 & 4	5	4	5
Content of Statement – Pt 4	2	2	1
Total	121	121	145

Table 3 – Appeal Outcome including cases disposed of prior to hearing

Appeal Outcome	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Granted at hearing	7	9	20
Partially Granted at hearing	1	1	1
Dismissed at hearing	5	5	4
Settled at hearing	1	1	0
Withdrawn at hearing	0	1	0
Cases conceded by Education Authority/Library Board before hearing	77	57	56
Cases withdrawn by parent before hearing	23	32	38

Appeal Outcome	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Total	114	106	119

Mr McCausland asked the Minister of Justice to outline the guidance issued to lay magistrates in relation to involvement in political activity or political lobbying.

(AQW 2524/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Eligibility criteria for appointment and re-appointment of Lay Magistrates state that a range of political offices and occupations may preclude an individual from being appointed where the role could create a perception of a conflict of interest. Individuals are asked to make a declaration if they, their spouse or partner or close relative hold any of these roles. If such a role is held, eligibility is considered on the particular circumstances of the individual case.

I understand that the Lord Chief Justice's Office has issued a Lay Magistrates' Handbook which is available online and states that "Lay Magistrates are expected to refrain from any activity, political or otherwise, which could conflict with their judicial office or be seen to compromise their impartiality."

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will conduct a review or assessment, in conjunction with the Minister of Health, to ascertain the numbers of people under 18 that are in care, regarded as at risk, looked after, or in any other way subject to Social Services intervention, that become involved in criminality and the judicial system; to establish (i) if prevention and / or deterrent is possible; (ii) if adequate safeguarding is in place to address the risks connected to criminality including non-association with negative influences; and (iii) to develop more stringent but streamlined safeguards in the best interests of the young person, in line with risk assessments, health and safety and child protection policies and procedures.

(AQW 2525/16-21)

Ms Sugden: It is often the most troubled and vulnerable children who find themselves caught up in the justice system. Many of these, including looked after children, have complex needs which no single Department can meet unilaterally. Addressing this was a key tenet of the cross-departmental Scoping Study on children, launched by my predecessor with a view to improving outcomes for all children in, or on the fringes of, the youth justice system.

You will be aware that overall responsibility for looked after children and those subject to Social Services intervention lies with the Department of Health. The Youth Justice Agency does not collect consolidated data on the number of these children who become involved in criminality and the judicial system, however the Department of Health has produced that information in their statistical bulletin, "Children in Care in Northern Ireland 2014-15".²

From our own analysis, we know that looked after children represent, on average, nearly one-third of all children admitted to custody at Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre:

Young People in Custody by Looked After Status, 2008/09 to 2014/15

Year	Total Young People	Looked After Status							
		Subject to Care		Voluntary		Not in Care		Unknown	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2008/09	153	31	20	1	1	120	78	1	1
2009/10	172	49	28	4	2	117	68	2	1
2010/11	214	43	20	34	16	135	63	2	1
2011/12	207	28	14	27	13	150	72	2	1
2012/13	211	38	18	25	12	145	69	3	1
2013/14	196	37	19	33	17	125	64	1	1
2014/15	199	35	18	31	16	132	66	1	1

Source: Youth Justice Agency Annual Workload Statistics 2014-15

Addressing the multiple problems faced by looked after children, and how best to support and guide those responsible for their care, were discussed as part of the Scoping Study. Many of the proposals arising from the first phase of this work will require closer working with the Department of Health and I intend to hold discussions with Minister O'Neill to agree on how we best take this work forward.

In relation to the issues around safeguarding and child protection, all Youth Justice Agency front-line staff are fully trained and compliant with the strict policies and procedures that are in place across both custody and community provision. The

² <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/child-care-ni-14-15.pdf>

Agency also sits as a key partner on the Safeguarding Board NI, and is working alongside other Departments to address the recommendations in the Marshall Report on Child Sexual Exploitation in Northern Ireland.

Mr Sheehan asked the Minister of Justice for her assessment of what can be done to both protect and manage the night time economy.

(AQW 2550/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department's Community Safety Strategy focuses on reducing crime which is likely to impact on a range of areas including the night time economy. Specifically, it is directed towards alcohol related crime, anti-social behaviour (ASB) and crime against the business community.

I recognise crimes against all types of business have far reaching impacts for the economy and damage the prosperity and perceptions of areas and their communities by discouraging growth and investment.

Crime against the business community, including those involved in the night time economy, is included in my Department's partnership approach to work with the Northern Ireland Policing Board (NIPB), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the business community to identify and tackle crime through a Business Crime Action Plan. I am pleased to note this plan provides a strategic view and addresses the quality of service businesses receive as well as the outcomes they seek.

At a local level my Department funds Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) who work with local councils and businesses to identify and resolve local priorities. Examples of measures supported by my Department include: Belfast Licence Premises Group, Community safety warden schemes, CCTV, Street Pastors and Safezone, No Boozing on Board campaign, Street Safe Project and awareness raising schemes.

In terms of alcohol and drug related crime specifically, my Department makes a significant strategic contribution to the outcomes of the New Strategic Direction on Drugs and Alcohol led by the Department for Health.

I also acknowledge the support that the PSNI provides to the night time economy with a focus on prevention of crime and enforcement of sanctions to contribute to the protection and management of the night time economy in relevant areas, such as south Belfast where the majority of Belfast's night time economy is situated. Examples include dedicated night time patrols in areas where the night time economy dictates same and shift patterns to ensure additional resources are available during peak periods for proactive patrolling to prevent anti-social behaviour, as well as providing a robust approach to on street drinking, incident behaviour, public order offences, and licensed premises inspections.

Mr McCrossan asked the Minister of Justice for an update on personal injury claims linked to the Omagh bombing.

(AQW 2562/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are two outstanding claims arising from the Omagh bomb.

Both claims are being held by Compensation Services pending further instruction from the victims' legal representatives.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in the absence of Serious Case Reviews, what accountability exists to (i) ensure public safety is protected; (ii) consider why sexual offenders were not subject to closer monitoring prior to reoffending based on previous activity; and (iii) how it is established which agency was responsible for monitoring people in the community.

(AQW 2564/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Ministerial Guidance is issued to the statutorily designated bodies operating within Public Protection Arrangement for Northern Ireland, on the exercise of their functions which contribute to the effective risk assessment and management of the risks posed by certain sexual and violent offenders.

Section 2.8 of the current guidance confirms that agencies are individually accountable for all actions taken to deliver public protection within their own statutory functions. A copy of the guidance is available at:

http://www.publicprotectionni.com/uploads/pdf/PPANI_Guidance_to_Agencies.pdf

Risk management plans are developed by relevant agencies through the Local Area Public Protection Panel (LAPPP). The plan is individual to an offender and focuses on the specific risks the offender poses, together with identifying appropriate treatment and supervision options to manage the risk. The risk management plan is reviewed regularly by the LAPPP.

A Designated Risk Manager (DRM) may be appointed from any of the agencies attending the LAPPP meeting. Where an offender is subject to statutory supervision, PSNI will be the DRM, responsible for monitoring the offender in the community. If the offender is not subject to statutory supervision, PSNI undertake the role of the DRM. In exceptional cases, the DRM may be appointed from one of the Health and Social Care Trusts.

Oversight of the PPANI arrangements is the responsibility of a Strategic Management Board comprising representative of designated statutory agencies and bodies with public protection interests and responsibilities.

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice what action is being taken to address attacks on Orange Halls.

(AQW 2601/16-21)

Ms Sugden: You will wish to note that the operational response to any attacks on Orange Halls is a matter for the Chief Constable.

I understand that the PSNI has a control strategy dealing with attacks on symbolic buildings. The control strategy contains actions and activities under four strands: Prevention, Intelligence, Enforcement and Reassurance.

Under the control strategy, PSNI patrols will continue to pay attention to symbolic buildings. Local Crime Prevention Officers are also available to provide security advice.

However, the underlying issues that can culminate in such attacks cannot be dealt with by the criminal justice system alone and require an Executive-wide response if they are to be tackled effectively.

As you will be aware, the Executive Office leads on tackling hate and intolerance in society more widely through the Executive's 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC) Strategy.

My Department supports this work through 'Building Safer, Shared and Confident Communities: A Community Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland 2012-2017'. The Strategy contains a commitment to tackle all forms of hate crime and reduce the harm it causes through prevention, awareness and education.

In support of this commitment, Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs), which are jointly funded by my Department and the Northern Ireland Policing Board, work at a local level to develop solutions to local issues and to enhance community safety.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice what discussion she or her Department has had with the UK Government on the future of the European Arrest Warrant once the UK leaves the EU.

(AQW 2602/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department expects to be working closely with Westminster Departments on all the implications of Brexit, including the European Arrest Warrant (EAW). Some initial contact has taken place at official level, and I have also discussed the future of the European Arrest Warrant with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and raised the safeguarding of criminal justice arrangements with the Home Secretary and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for exiting the EU when I met with them in London on 15 September 2016.

No discussions on the EAW have taken place with EU officials.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice what discussions have taken place to ascertain whether sentencing policy is acting as a deterrent.

(AQW 2603/16-21)

Ms Sugden: On 9 June 2016 I announced a review of sentencing policy. This comprehensive review will consider periodic concerns raised about sentencing issues, including the public perception that sentences in individual cases may not act as a sufficient deterrent. Such perceptions can, in turn, impact on public confidence in the justice system.

The review will assess the extent to which the current sentencing guidelines mechanism meets the objectives of enhanced consistency, transparency and confidence in sentencing, and consider possible alternative approaches.

The Review will also look at wider issues within the legislative framework, including: sentencing for crimes against older and vulnerable people, for hate crime and for attacks on certain frontline public service staff; the maximum penalty available for those offences which may result in death; the underlying policy and scope of the unduly lenient sentence provisions; and the legislation governing the determination of tariffs following the imposition of life sentences for murder.

Recommendations arising out of the Review will be subject to public consultation.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice what discussion she or her Department has had with EU Officials on the future of the European Arrest Warrant once the UK leaves the EU.

(AQW 2604/16-21)

Ms Sugden: My Department expects to be working closely with Westminster Departments on all the implications of Brexit, including the European Arrest Warrant (EAW). Some initial contact has taken place at official level, and I have also discussed the future of the European Arrest Warrant with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and raised the safeguarding of criminal justice arrangements with the Home Secretary and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for exiting the EU when I met with them in London on 15 September 2016.

No discussions on the EAW have taken place with EU officials.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the renovations due to take place at Dungannon Courthouse, including the timescale for work and the additional provision and services that will be accommodated.

(AQW 2637/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are no renovations planned for Dungannon Courthouse. The only work scheduled is to install a fixed prisoner dock in Courtroom 3. The timing for this has not yet been confirmed.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether she will increase the number of times a convicted sex offender is required to sign with PSNI as per notification arrangements from the current annual report to a quarterly report.

(AQW 2638/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have no plans to change the statutory notification requirement periods currently in place for convicted sex offenders, which apply across the United Kingdom.

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 requires that an offender must notify personal details to the police on an annual basis, or weekly if the person has no fixed abode. The offender must also notify, within three days of its occurrence, any change to the information provided. Additionally, the offender must notify when they plan to travel to other places within the United Kingdom and when travelling abroad.

The PSNI remains of the view that the current periods provide sufficient time for risk management purposes.

Mrs Palmer asked the Minister of Justice when re-married RUC widows that were widowed before 1988 will get access to their pensions.

(AQW 2682/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Section 30 of the Public Sector Pensions (NI) Act 2014, entitles all RUC widows, widowed before 1988, to reinstatement of their pensions from 1 July 2014, with the exception of widows in the 1949 pension scheme whose husband left the service before 1 April 1972.

In order to give effect to the will of the Assembly, on 1 April 2015, Schedule 5 of the Police Pensions Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015 extended this provision to include widows under the 1949 pension scheme.

The reinstatement of payments to re-married RUC widows commenced in February 2015. I understand that the PSNI Pensions Branch has, to date, processed all related individual enquiries.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice what type of offenders, in terms of crimes committed, were diverted from custody as part of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Enhanced Combination Order pilot.

(AQW 2687/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The type of offender diverted from custody, as part of the Probation Board Enhanced Combination Order pilot, has been wide and varied. Included are offenders convicted of violent offences, theft/burglary, driving or drug related offences and public order offences. A full list of offence types is attached at Annex A.

Offence Type

Annex A

Affray (Common Law)	Fraud by False Misrepresentation
Aggravated Vehicle Taking causing Damage to Property	Fraudulent evasion of customs prohibition on importation of goods
Aiding and Abetting Blackmail	Going Equipped for Burglary
AOABH	Going Equipped for Theft
Assault	Grievous Bodily Harm
Assault on Police	Grievous Bodily Harm with intent
Attempted Robbery	Harassment
Breach of Non- Molestation Order	Improper use of electronic communications network
Breach of Order or Licence	Indecent Behaviour
Breach of Suspended Sentence	Interference with Vehicles
Burglary and Theft – Dwelling	Making off without payment
Burglary and Theft - Non Dwelling	Malicious Damage
Carrying a Firearm in Public Place (Imitation Firearm)	No Driving Licence
Causing Grievous Bodily Injury by Dangerous Driving	No Insurance
Causing unnecessary suffering to animals	No L Plates
Common Assault on Adult	No Vehicle Test Certificate
Counterfeiting	Obstructing Police
Criminal Damage	Obstructing powers of search for drugs
Cultivating Cannabis	Possessing an offensive weapon in public place

Affray (Common Law)	Fraud by False Misrepresentation
Dangerous Driving	Possessing article with blade or point in public place
Defective Tyres	Possessing Class A Controlled Drug
Dishonestly causing electricity to be diverted	Possessing Class B Controlled Drug
Disorderly Behaviour	Possessing Class C Drug
Driver unable to have full view of road	Possessing Criminal Property
Driving when unfit through drink or drugs	Possessing Firearm in suspicious circumstances
Driving whilst Disqualified	Possession of a weapon designed/adapted for discharge of electricity
Driving with excess alcohol in breath	Possession of articles for use in fraud
Driving without due care and attention	Production of Class B Controlled Drug
Entering any Premises with intent wrongly to take possession	Resisting Police
Entering public building as trespasser	Robbery
Exporting controlled drugs	Supplying Class B controlled drug
Failing to provide specimen of blood/urine	Taking a Motor Vehicle without Owner's Consent
Failing to provide Specimen of Breath	Theft
Failing to Remain - Damage only Incident	Theft - Shoplifting
Failing to remain - injury accident	Threats to Kill
Failing to report - injury incident	Unaccompanied L Driver
Failing to stop for police	Using Motor Vehicle in Dangerous Condition

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice how many of the 84 offenders who were diverted from custody by the end of August 2016 as part of the Probation Board for Northern Ireland's Enhanced Combination Order pilot launched in October 2015, have re-offended in that period.

(AQW 2688/16-21)

Ms Sugden: As at the end of August 2016 a total of 85 offenders have been made subject to an Enhanced Combination Order (ECO). Since becoming subject to an ECO, 10 of these 85 offenders have been charged or reported to the Public Prosecution Service for new offences.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice when will the draft Bill to create the new justice institutions proposed under the Fresh Start Agreement be published for consultation.

(AQW 2689/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The draft Bill to establish the legacy bodies proposed by the Stormont House Agreement is a Westminster Bill, sponsored by the Northern Ireland Office. The Secretary of State is leading the process of preparing the legislation and the timing of the draft Bill's publication is a matter for him.

Mr Beattie asked the Minister of Justice when she will be able to create costings for the full package of measures for dealing with the past as contained in the Fresh Start Agreement.

(AQW 2690/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Significant work has been undertaken by my Department in preparation for the establishment of the justice elements of the Stormont House Agreement – the Fresh Start Agreement didn't include agreement on the establishment of the proposed legacy institutions. Whilst work on projected costings has been progressing, I would expect such costings to be finalised once political agreement is reached on a draft Stormont House Bill.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many applications for legal aid support for Judicial Review were (i) received; (ii) refused at first instance; and (iii) permitted on appeal, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2711/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The information requested is provided per financial year in the table below:

Financial Year	JR Applications Received	Refusals	Refusals as % of Total	Appealed	Appealed as % of Refusals	Granted Upon Appeal ¹	Granted as % of Appealed
2011/12	329	133	40%	112	84%	36	32%
2012/13	418	181	43%	151	83%	63	42%
2013/14	407	158	39%	134	85%	49	37%
2014/15	485	210	43%	171	81%	77	45%
2015/16	367	162	44%	113	70%	35	31%

Notes: Information is generated at a point in time

1 Includes first decisions which are Grants and Grants subject to conditions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1478/16-21, whether funding which is paid to family members of murdered officers, and officers who died in service or retired on ill-health grounds, is available exclusively to members and families of late members of the Prison Service Trust.

(AQW 2722/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The Prison Service Trust provides healthcare, life planning and support services. These services are offered to their client base which includes: serving members who donate to the Trust, family members of murdered officers, and officers who died in service or retired on ill-health grounds.

This does not preclude the Trust from the provision of other services, or to persons other than those within the client group from monies other than those received by government grant, i.e. member subscriptions.

Details of how the funding is distributed are contained in the Annual Report which can be found on the Trust's website. (<http://www.pst-ni.co.uk/>)

Scheduled Prisoners: HMP Maghaberry

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many scheduled prisoners are in (i) Bush House; and (ii) Roe House in HMP Maghaberry; and to provide the number factions in each.

(AQW 2723/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are 18 separated loyalist prisoners held in Bush House and 24 separated republican prisoners in Roe House. The information relied upon to determine the affiliation of each prisoner is confidential.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 31/16-21, AQW 71/16-21, AQW 723/16-21 and AQW 1056/16-21, whether she will revise the criteria for a Serious Case Review or bring forward a fresh initiative to ensure scrutiny and accountability for all agencies tasked with persons in these instances, including giving consideration to an independent investigative body or ombudsman.

(AQW 2724/16-21)

Ms Sugden: I have currently no plans to revise the criteria for a Serious Case Review as set out in the Public Protection Arrangements for Northern Ireland (PPANI) Manual of Practice.

Ministerial Guidance is issued to the statutorily designated bodies operating within Public Protection Arrangement for Northern Ireland, on the exercise of their functions which contribute to the effective risk assessment and management of the risks posed by certain sexual and violent offenders.

Section 2.8 of the current guidance confirms that agencies are individually accountable for all actions taken to deliver public protection within their own statutory functions. A copy of the guidance is available at: http://www.publicprotectionni.com/uploads/pdf/PPANI_Guidance_to_Agencies.pdf

This ensures that designated agencies within PPANI are subject to independent scrutiny for individual actions taken to deliver public protection.

Ms Ní Chuilín asked the Minister of Justice to detail the legislation brought forward to prevent the sale of legal highs; and how many people have been prosecuted for selling legal highs.

(AQW 2755/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Psychoactive substances, commonly and misguidedly termed "legal highs" became illegal on 26 May 2016, when the Psychoactive Substances Act came into effect in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK. The Act makes it an offence to produce, supply or offer to supply any psychoactive substance if the substance is likely to be used for its psychoactive effects, regardless of its potential for harm.

Prior to the commencement of this Act, the PSNI worked with my department and a range of partner agencies including Belfast City Council, and the Public Health Agency to tackle the issue of psychoactive substances which were being sold over the counter from head shops across Northern Ireland. Under The General Product Safety Regulations 2005, orders were granted against head shop owners as safety and labelling information was deemed to be inadequate. This resulted in the closure of all head shops and in a number of successful prosecutions for selling these substances.

Since the introduction of the Psychoactive Substances Act, two people have been charged with possession of new psychoactive substances and files are currently with the PPS. A further two people are currently on investigation bail pending forensic analysis of the substances seized. The PSNI continue to mount operations to identify, detect and disrupt the sale of new psychoactive substances.

Ms Bailey asked the Minister of Justice in relation to women accessing abortion; to outline how many arrests, investigations, received reports, referral to Public Prosecution Service, and sanctions by the Police Service of Northern Ireland under the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and other related regulations or legislation including the use of poisons broken down each year over the last ten years.

(AQW 2777/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The information requested refers specifically to police operational business and is not held by my Department. The information may be available from the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 1879/16-21, how many of these facilities are Simon Community facilities.

(AQW 2794/16-21)

Ms Sugden: There are seven approved premises in Northern Ireland, two of which are managed by the Simon Community.

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether offender levys imposed with a custodial sentence can be dealt with by immediate warrant.

(AQW 2796/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Specific provision has been made in the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 which prevents the court from issuing an immediate warrant on any levy imposed on an immediate custodial sentence at the point of sentencing. This provision was included to protect the levy's status, and to allow for its collection from convicted prisoners in custody.

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Justice for an update on plans to undertake works to the perimeter of the Strabane PSNI station; and whether the views of local residents have formed part of the scoping exercise.

(AQW 2840/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Works are planned for the perimeter of Strabane PSNI station, including the perimeter fence and the sangar, that will improve its appearance and reduce its visual impact. While the views of local residents have been taken into account, the exact scope and timings of the works have still to be agreed.

Mrs Cameron asked the Minister of Justice why serving prison officers are receiving only 50 per cent of the agreed monthly environmental allowance.

(AQW 2857/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Northern Ireland Prison Service staff eligible for the Supplementary Risk Allowance are receiving the full amount of that allowance, which is currently £2,000 per annum.

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice how many confiscation orders have been obtained in each of the last five years, broken down by (i) the amount on each order; and (ii) the constituency in which each order was actioned.

(AQW 2901/16-21)

Ms Sugden: The number of confiscation orders made in each of the last five years is outlined below in Tables 1 to 5. The information is presented by the recoverable amount of each order (in bands) and the County Court Division in which the order was made.

Confiscation orders are made in the Crown Court. Consequently, the lowest geographical level for which these can be reported is the County Court Division in which the order was made.

Table 1 - Confiscation Orders made, by Court Division and amount: 2011

Court Division	Amount (£)						Total
	Less than £20,000	£20,001 to £40,000	£40,001 to £60,000	£60,001 to £80,000	£80,001 to £100,000	Over £100,000	
Belfast	7	3	3	0	1	5	19
Londonderry	2	2	1	0	0	0	5
Antrim	5	2	2	1	0	0	10
Fermanagh and Tyrone	8	1	1	2	0	1	13
Armagh and South Down	4	2	1	0	0	1	8
Ards	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Craigavon	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Total	28	13	9	3	1	7	61

Table 2 - Confiscation Orders made, by Court Division and amount: 2012

Court Division	Amount (£)						Total
	Less than £20,000	£20,001 to £40,000	£40,001 to £60,000	£60,001 to £80,000	£80,001 to £100,000	Over £100,000	
Belfast	10	5	2	1	1	1	20
Londonderry	2	0	1	0	0	0	3
Antrim	1	0	1	0	1	0	3
Fermanagh and Tyrone	2	1	0	0	0	0	3
Armagh and South Down	6	0	1	0	0	2	9
Ards	1	2	0	1	0	1	5
Craigavon	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	22	8	6	2	2	4	44

Table 3 - Confiscation Orders made, by Court Division and amount: 2013

Court Division	Amount (£)						Total
	Less than £20,000	£20,001 to £40,000	£40,001 to £60,000	£60,001 to £80,000	£80,001 to £100,000	Over £100,000	
Belfast	17	2	1	1	1	3	25
Londonderry	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Antrim	2	4	0	0	0	0	6
Fermanagh and Tyrone	6	0	0	0	1	0	7
Armagh and South Down	5	3	1	0	1	0	10
Ards	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Craigavon	5	0	0	0	0	2	7
Total	37	11	3	1	3	5	60

Table 4 - Confiscation Orders made, by Court Division and amount: 2014

Court Division	Amount (£)						Total
	Less than £20,000	£20,001 to £40,000	£40,001 to £60,000	£60,001 to £80,000	£80,001 to £100,000	Over £100,000	
Belfast	13	4	2	3	1	3	26
Londonderry	4	2	0	0	0	1	7
Antrim	2	2	0	0	0	1	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	5	0	2	0	1	0	8
Armagh and South Down	6	1	1	1	0	2	11
Ards	0	3	0	1	0	0	4
Craigavon	3	0	1	1	0	1	6
Total	33	12	6	6	2	8	67

Table 5 - Confiscation Orders made, by Court Division and amount: 2015

Court Division	Amount (£)						Total
	Less than £20,000	£20,001 to £40,000	£40,001 to £60,000	£60,001 to £80,000	£80,001 to £100,000	Over £100,000	
Belfast	4	5	1	1	0	0	11
Londonderry	1	1	1	0	0	0	3
Antrim	3	1	0	0	0	1	5
Fermanagh and Tyrone	3	0	0	1	0	0	4
Armagh and South Down	2	0	0	0	2	2	6
Ards	8	0	1	0	0	2	11
Craigavon	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	24	7	3	2	2	5	43

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice what restraints and guidelines exist on the types of DVDs and videos to which prisoners can have access.

(AQW 3116/16-21)

Ms Sugden: Prisoners may purchase DVDs from prison tuckshops who source them from a national supplier. Any order that gives concern will be referred to a manager for consideration. DVDs of a homemade or amateur nature are not permitted.

It is not possible to hold a prescriptive list of unauthorised titles. The Northern Ireland Prison Service has a duty to provide a neutral working/living environment and titles that could cause offence for reasons of decency are not permitted. Titles that glorify extreme violence, including sexual violence and terrorism are also not permitted.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Swann asked the Assembly Commission to detail the cost of legal advice provided to the Independent Financial Review Panel in relation to its Determinations in 2016.

(AQW 2360/16-21)

Mr Dickson (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Independent Financial Review Panel published two Determinations in 2016 – The Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016 and The Assembly Members (Pensions) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Legislative drafting services were provided by specialist external parliamentary agents and counsel. The cost of these legal services was £44,020.

Legal advice was also provided to the Panel by the Commission's Directorate of Legal and Governance Services, in accordance with the statutory obligations of the Commission under Schedule 2 of the Assembly Members (Independent Financial Review and Standards) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. No additional costs were incurred by the Commission in the provision of this legal advice.

Lord Morrow asked the Assembly Commission, pursuant to AQW 534/16-21 and when this matter is considered, whether it will take in to account both the welfare of the individual requiring assistance and being turned away, as well as staff costs. **(AQW 2432/16-21)**

Mr Wells (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Commission has yet to consider the out-workings of the Assembly Members (Salaries and Expenses) Determination (Northern Ireland) 2016 but detailed guidance has already been provided to Members to ensure compliance with the full requirements of the Determination.

Any review by the Commission will consider whether further guidance and support can be provided to Members to facilitate compliance with the Determination. The Commission cannot arbitrarily amend the specific provisions or requirements of the Determination based on the circumstances that pertain to an individual constituent who avails of services in a constituency office.

As noted in the reply to AQW 534/16-21, the Commission cannot offer advice to Members that may cause a Member to breach the limits of 37 hours for a single employee or a total of 74 hours for all employees.

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

Friday 29 July 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department for Communities

In Bound Volume 116, page WA 43, replace the answer given for AQW 821/16-21 with:

Mr Hussey asked the Minister for Communities (i) when the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) will publish the final report of its investigation into the affairs of the Disabled Police Officers Association Northern Ireland (DPOANI); (ii) how many Directors or Trustees resigned from DPOANI during this inquiry; (iii) on how many occasions CCNI staff attended DPOANI board meetings between August 2014 and July 2015; (iv) how many of those affected by suspensions were consulted prior to the interim report being written; (v) if they were not consulted, to outline the reasons why; (vi) on how many occasions the CCNI met with the DPOA NI Directors before the initiation of their statutory enquiry; and (vii) to outline the extensive engagement that took place prior to the statutory inquiry.

(AQW 821/16-21)

Mr Givan (The Minister for Communities):

- (i) The timetable for the publication of the final report of the investigation of the DPOANI has not yet been confirmed;
- (ii) Eight Directors or Trustees resigned from DPOANI during the course of the inquiry;
- (iii) Records indicate that five DPOANI Board meetings were attended by CCNI staff between August 2014 and July 2015;
- (iv) None of those affected by suspensions were consulted prior to the interim report being written;
- (v) All of the information contained in the interim report was factual and already within the public domain and CCNI considered there was no need to consult;
- (vi) CCNI met with DPOANI Directors (both former and present) on two occasions before the initiation of the statutory inquiry;
- (vii) On receipt of concerns, supported by documentary evidence, on 8 November 2016 CCNI contacted the charity and requested information in order to negate or confirm the concerns received. CCNI held meetings with concerned parties and there was extensive correspondence between CCNI and the charity following which a risk assessment was presented to CCNI Commissioners who approved the opening of the inquiry on 14 February 2014.

In Bound Volume 116, page WA 364, replace the answer given for AQW 2030/16-21 with:

Ms Lockhart asked the Minister for Communities to detail his Department's investment in (i) Lurgan; (ii) Portadown; and (iii) Banbridge town centres, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 2030/16-21)

Mr Givan:

Town Centre	Financial Year					Total £'000
	2011/12 £'000	2012/13 £'000	2013/14 £'000	2014/15 £'000	2015/16 £'000	
Lurgan	1,062	1,218	550	10	543	3,383
Portadown	762	361	320	49	-	1,492
Banbridge	112	444	429	192	97	1,274
ABC wide projects excl Armagh	-	-	18	-	155	173
Total	1,936	2,023	1,317	251	795	6,322

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 2 September 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

In this Bound Volume, page WA 154, replace the answer given for AQW 576/16-21 with:

Mr McKee asked the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to detail the total cost of the Bovine TB Eradication Programme over each of the last five years.
(AQW 576/16-21)

Miss McIlveen (The Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs): Please ignore the previous response issued to you on 2 August 2016 as the total cost for the 2014/15 financial year has required correction.

The total cost of the Bovine TB Eradication Programme over each of the last five years was:

Financial year	Total cost
2014/15	£29,093,105
2013/14	£26,918,006
2012/13	£30,884,976
2011/12	£26,658,721
2010/11	£22,096,909

Final figures for the 2015/16 financial year are not yet available.

Since 2010 DAERA's Bovine TB Eradication Programme has been approved by the European Commission as part of the UK Bovine TB Eradication Plan. This has secured EU co-funding as set out below which partially offsets the above costs.

Calendar Year	EU co-funding
2014	£3,981,646.47
2013	£4,455,605.00
2012	£5,227,420.00
2011	£4,475,558.00
2010	£4,615,083.00

The 2015 figure is not yet available

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 23 September 2016

Revised Written Answers

Department of Finance

In this Bound Volume, page WA 260, replace the answer given for AQW 2419/16-21 with:

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance (i) how many Freedom of Information requests he has received since coming to office; (ii) how many of these have been answered; (iii) how many of these were read by his Special Adviser; and (iv) how many were altered or amended either by, or at the request of, his Special Adviser.

(AQW 2419/16-21)

Mr Ó Muilleoir (The Minister of Finance):

- (i) Since coming to office on 25th May 2016, there have been 77 FOI requests received by DoF.
- (ii) As of 13th September 2016, DoF has responded to 57 of the requests received, and the remaining 20 requests are still being processed.
- (iii) 3 of the responses have been read by the Special Advisor.
- (iv) None of the above have been altered or amended either by, or at the request of, the Special Adviser.

Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 12 September 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 22 July 2016 to the Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. The Speaker also informed Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 29 July 2016 to the Budget (No.2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

2.2 Member Resignation

The Speaker informed Members that Mr Daithí McKay resigned as a Member of the Assembly with effect from 18 August 2016. The Speaker advised that the Speaker's Office had notified the Chief Electoral Officer, in accordance with section 35 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

2.3 New Member

The Speaker informed Members that he had been notified by the Chief Electoral Officer that Mr Philip McGuigan had been returned as a Member of the Assembly for the North Antrim constituency to fill the vacancy that resulted from the resignation of Mr Daithí McKay.

Mr McGuigan signed undertaking, as provided for in the Northern Ireland (Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan) Act 2016, and the Roll of Membership on 30 August 2016 in the presence of the Speaker and the Clerk to the Assembly. The Speaker confirmed that Mr McGuigan had signed the undertaking and then the Roll and had entered his designation of identity.

2.4 Speaker's Remarks

The Speaker made some brief remarks in respect of Committee procedures.

3. Assembly Business

3.1 Motion – Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Ian Milne be appointed as a member of the Committee for Health; Mr Philip McGuigan replace Mr Ian Milne as a member of the Committee for the Executive Office and that Mr Philip McGuigan be appointed as a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee.

Ms C Ní Chuilín

Mr D McAleer

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes Sectoral Format

The Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council in Special EU Programmes Sectoral format, which was held in Dublin on Friday 7 July 2016, following which he replied to questions.

5. Private Members' Business

5.1 Motion – Stalking

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern that for too long stalking has remained a hidden crime, which is not only insidious and terrifying, but that can result in psychological harm and, in the most serious of cases, murder; and calls on the Minister of Justice to examine whether the introduction of new legislation to protect and safeguard victims of stalking is needed in Northern Ireland.

Mrs B Hale

Mr P Frew

Mrs P Cameron

Ms P Bradley

5.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'Justice' and insert:

"to develop and table new legislation to enable crimes of stalking to be prosecuted based on the stalker's behaviour and the effects on the victims."

Mr A Attwood

Ms S Bradley

Ms C Hanna

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

6. Question Time

6.1 Economy

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Simon Hamilton.

6.2 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr Peter Weir.

The Speaker took the Chair.

7. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

7.1 Motion – Stalking (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made**.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

7.2 Motion – Housing Selection Scheme

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Communities to bring forward a replacement to the Housing Selection Scheme that ensures a fairer and more transparent system of assessing housing need.

*Mr F McCann
Mrs M Gildernew
Ms C Ní Chuilín*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.12pm.

**Mr Robin Newton
The Speaker**

12 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 29 June 2016 - 12 September 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

Budget (No.2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016.

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Public Prosecution Service (NI) - Annual Report and Resource Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Environment Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16.

Driver and Vehicle Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfI).

The Impact of Prisoner Recalls on the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland (DoJ).

Police Ombudsman Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Policing Board Annual Report and Accounts (DoJ).

Professional Standards Authority for Health & Social Care: Review of Professional Regulation and Registration and Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Department of Finance Retention and Disposal Schedule (DoF).

Department for Infrastructure Retention and Disposal Schedule (DfI).

Executive Office Retention and Disposal Schedule (TEO).

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland - Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

Report on an Announced Inspection of Maghaberry Prison 4-15 January 2016 (DoJ).

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education Director's Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DE).

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service - Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Youth Justice Agency - Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Legal Services Agency - Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Forest Service - 2015-16 Annual Report and Accounts (DAERA).

Social Security Agency - Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland - Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).

Public Health Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Health and Social Care Board Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Probation Board for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Prison Service Annual reports and Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Committee on Climate Change (CCC) - Meeting Carbon Budgets, 2016 Progress Report to Parliament (DAERA).

The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts (DfC).

Parole Commissioners for Northern Ireland Annual Report 2015-16 (DoJ).

NISRA Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoF).

2015 - 2016 Report of the Appointed Person for Northern Ireland Under Sections 195I and 291 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (DoJ).

Northern Ireland Authority for Utility Regulation Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DfE).

Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Northern Ireland Audit Office Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (NIAO).

Police Service Northern Ireland - Police Pension Accounts for The Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ)

Department of Finance and Personnel Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoF).

Department of Finance and Personnel Superannuation and Other Allowances Pension Schemes Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoF).

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoF).

Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment Annual report for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfE).

Department for Regional Development Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfI).

Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

Department of Justice Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DAERA).

HSC Pension Scheme Statement for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Department of Education – Teachers' Superannuation Annual Scheme for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 Statements (DE).

Department for Social Development Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

Department of the Environment Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DAERA).

Department for Employment and Learning Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (TEO).

Northern Ireland Judicial Pension Scheme Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Department of Education Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DE).

Police Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust - Final Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoF).

Equality Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (TEO).

Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta - Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DE).

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman's Annual Report 2015-16 (NIPSO).

UK Statistics Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (UKSA).

BBC Annual Report & Accounts and Full Financial Statements 2015-16 (DfC).

British Library Annual Reports and Accounts (DfC).

The United Kingdom Sports Council Grant-in-aid and Lottery Distribution Fund Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

CCEA Annual Report 2015/16 (DE).

Heritage Lottery Fund Annual Report and Accounts (DfC).

National Heritage Memorial Lottery Fund Annual Report and Accounts (DfC).

Committee on Climate Change (CCC) - Annual Report and Accounts 2015/16 (DAERA).

Press Recognition Panel Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DfC).

Youth Council for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DE).

National Crime Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoJ).

Ulster Supported Employment Ltd Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).

Memorandum of Understanding between the United Kingdom Drinking Water Regulators (DAERA).

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DE).

Labour Relations Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfE).

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Charitable Trust Fund Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Big Lottery Fund 2015/2016 Annual Report and Accounts (DfC).

The Commissioner for Public Appointments Northern Ireland Annual Report 2015/2016 (TEO).

The Annual Report and Accounts of the Charitable Trust Funds Held by the South Eastern HSC Trust (DoH).

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts (DoH).

Annual Report and Accounts of the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC) 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016 (NIAO).

Annual Report and Accounts of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council April 2015 - March 2016 (NIAO).

Invest NI: Annual Report and Annual Accounts 2015/16 (DfE).

NI Guardian Ad Litem Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfC).

Criminal Cases Review Commission Annual Report and Accounts 2015/16 (DoJ).

Loughs Agency Annual Report (DAERA).

Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service Investment Account Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Forensic Science Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoJ).

Housing Executive Annual Report 2015/16 (DfC).

NIMDTA Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Western Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Annual Report and Accounts of the Trust Funds Held by the Western Health and Social Care Trust for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

The Patient and Client Council Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Funds Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

The Accounts of the Charitable Trust Funds Held by Northern Health and Social Care Trust for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Northern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Annual Report of the Registrar General (DoF).

Business Services Organisation Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

The Annual Report and Accounts for the General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland (DfE).

Retention and Disposal Schedules of Mid Ulster Council (DfC).

Department of Finance Minute on the Direction of Accruing Resources (DoF).

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Annual Report and Accounts 2015/16 (DoH).

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Funds Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DoH).

Northern Ireland Local Governments Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) Annual Report and Accounts 2015/16 (DfC).

Driver and Vehicle Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2015-16 (DfI).

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board Annual Report and Accounts 2015/16 (DAERA).

Northern Ireland Central Investment Fund for Charities Annual Report and Accounts to 30 September 2015 (DfC).

Northern Ireland Water Annual Report and Accounts (DfI).

Northern Ireland Fisheries Authority - Annual Report and Accounts for Year Ended 31 March 2016 (DAERA).

PRONI Report of the Deputy Keeper of Records (DfC).

5. Assembly Reports

Code of Conduct and Guide to the Rules relating to the Conduct of Members (NIA 5/16-21) (Committee on Standards and Privileges).

6. Statutory Rules

SR 2016/245 The Proceeds of Crime Act (Appeals under Part 4) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/249 The Food Information (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/251 The Food Safety (Information and Compositional Requirements) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/255 The Registered Rents (Increase) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/257 The Landlord Registration Scheme (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/259 The Plant Health (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).

SR 2016/266 The Control of Electromagnetic Fields at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfE).

SR 2016/267 The Railways (Safety Management) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/268 The Juries (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/269 The Fair Employment (Specification of Public Authorities) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (TEO).

SR 2016/270 The Discretionary Support Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/274 The Care Tribunal (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/291 The Donaghadee (Harbour Area) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

SR 2016/294 The Licensing (Designation of Outdoor Stadia) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/295 The Licensing (Form of Licence) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/296 The Licensing (Designation of Outdoor Stadia) (No.2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/297 The Crown Court (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/298 The Crown Court (Criminal Procedure and Investigations Act 1996) (Tainted Acquittals) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

- SR 2016/299 The Rules of the Court Judicature (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/300 The County Court (Miscellaneous Amendments) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/301 The Family Proceedings (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/302 The County Court (Amendments) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/303 The Magistrates Courts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/304 The Magistrates Courts (Amendment No. 2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/309 The Pollution Prevention Control (Industrial Emissions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).
- SR 2016/310 The Housing Benefit (Abolition of the Family Premium and date of claim) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
- SR 2016/316 The Employers' Duties (Implementation) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
- SR 2016/317 The Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (Single Jurisdiction) (Consequential Amendments and Revocations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/318 The Gilpinstown Road (U1401), Lurgan (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/320 The Rann Road/Annacloy Road, Downpatrick (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/321 The Wandsworth Court, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/322 The B122 Murley Road, Fivemiletown (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/323 The Old Road Off U1040 Lough Lane, Lurgan (Abandonment) Order 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/324 The Fortwilliam Parade, Belfast (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

For Information Only

- SR 2016/193 (Correction Slip) The Child Support (Deduction Orders and Fees) (Amendment and Modification) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).
- (C.20) SR 2016/248 The Justice (2016 Act) (Commencement No.1) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/256 The Road Races (Armoy Motorcycle Race) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/260 The Road Races (Garron Point Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/261 The Road Races (Eagles Rock Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/262 The One Way Traffic (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/263 The Bus Lanes (Divis Street and Falls Road, Belfast – Between Millfield and Grosvenor Road) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/264 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/271 The Roads (Speed Limit) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/272 The Roads (Speed Limit) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/273 The Parking Places (Disabled Persons' Vehicles) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/275 The Road Races (Ulster Grand Prix Bike Week) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/276 The Waiting Restrictions (Millisle) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/277 The Waiting Restrictions (Lambeg) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/278 The One-Way Traffic (Ballyclare) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/279 The Waiting Restrictions (Templepatrick) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/280 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Newtownards) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/281 The One-Way Traffic (Omagh) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

- SR 2016/282 The Prohibition of U-Turn (A3 Northway, Portadown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/283 The Prohibition of Right-Hand Turn (Carrickfergus) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/284 The Parking Places and Waiting Restrictions (Moy) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/285 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Londonderry) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/286 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Dungannon) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/287 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Belfast) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/288 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Banbridge) (Amendment No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/289 The Parking Places, Loading Bays and Waiting Restrictions (Portadown) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/290 The Road Races (Ulster Rally) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/292 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Lurgan) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/293 The Prohibition of Waiting (Schools) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/302 (Correction Slip) The County Court (Amendments) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/303 (Correction Slip) The Magistrates Courts (Miscellaneous Amendments) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/304 (Correction Slip) The Magistrates Courts (Amendment No. 2) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/305 The Cycle Routes (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/306 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Carrickfergus) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/307 The Taxi Buses (Belfast) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/308 The Control of Traffic (Armagh) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).
- SR 2016/311 The Road Races (Knockagh Hill Climb) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI)
- (C.21) SR 2016/312 The Financial Provisions (2014 Act) (Commencement No. 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).
- SR 2016/319 The Road Races (Down Rally) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

All Island Congenital Heart Disease Network (DoH).

A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dualling Scheme (DfI).

The Executive Office and the Department of Justice – Executive Strategy for Tackling Paramilitary Activity (TEO and DoJ).

8. Consultation Documents

Consultation on the consolidation of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packing Waste) 2007 and subsequent amendments (DAERA).

Consultation on the Proposal for Rail Passengers' Rights and Obligations (Designation and Enforcement) Regulations (NI) 2016 (DfI).

Consultation on the Proposals for Level Crossing (Bellarena) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016, Level Crossing (Castlerock) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 and Level Crossing (Coleraine (Bushmills Road)) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfI).

A Consultation Paper on Proposals for the Provision of Strategic Support to the Voluntary and Community Sector in Northern Ireland 2017-2021 (DfC).

Consultation on Implementing amendments to the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive in relation to Driving Instructors and Motorcycle Instructors (DfI).

Consultation on Protect Life 2 - A Strategy for Suicide Prevention in the north of Ireland (DoH).

9. Departmental Publications

The Greenhouse Gas Emissions Charging Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).

The Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) NIEA Charging Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).

The Radioactive Substances (Fees and Charges) Scheme (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).

The Waste Management Charging (Northern Ireland) Scheme 2016 (DAERA).

A Scheme of Fees and Charges to Recover the Costs of Processing Licence Applications under the Water Abstraction and Impoundment (Licensing) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (DAERA).

Fees and Charges to Recover the Cost of Processing Consent Applications and the Regulation of Discharges under the Water (Northern Ireland) Order 1999 (DAERA).

Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs and the Department for Infrastructure (DAERA).

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

2018 Review of Parliamentary Constituencies Publication of Provisional Proposals report (Boundary Commission).

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Gambling Commission Annual Report and Financial Statements 2015/16 (Gambling Commission).

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 13 September 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Plenary Meeting

The deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness, made a statement regarding the twenty second meeting of the North South Ministerial Council Plenary format, which was held in Dublin on Monday 4 July 2016, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement – British-Irish Council

The First Minister, the Rt Hon Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the twenty seventh summit of the British-Irish Council which was held in Cardiff on Friday 22 July 2016, following which she replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) took the Chair.

2.3 Statement – Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden, made a statement regarding the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which she replied to questions.

3. Private Members' Business

3.1 Motion – Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport

Proposed:

That this Assembly expresses its concern at the lack of competitiveness and availability of rail services between Belfast city centre and Belfast International Airport; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to investigate all options for remedial action including the re-introduction of the Lisburn to Antrim rail link.

Mr P Girvan

Mr T Clarke

Mr E Poots

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.50pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Finance

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance, Mr Máirtín Ó Muilleoir.

4.2 Health

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

5. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

5.1 Motion – Rail Services between Belfast City Centre and Belfast International Airport (cont'd)

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Ms Catherine Seeley spoke to her topic regarding Investing in Town Centres in Upper Bann.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.35pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

13 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

**Papers Presented to the Assembly on
13 September 2016**

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 Rivers Agency: Flood Prevention and Management (DfI).
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
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 13 September 2016

2016-2021 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
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-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

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 19 September 2016

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – Access to Cancer Drugs

Ms Paula Bradshaw was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition regarding Access to Cancer Drugs.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 First Stage – Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21)

A Bill to make provision about liquor licensing and the registration of clubs.

The Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21) passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion – A Vision for Northern Ireland Outside the European Union

Proposed:

That this Assembly, in light of the referendum decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, endorses and adopts the approach contained in A Vision for Northern Ireland Outside the European Union, published by the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr S Aiken

Mr P Smith

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) took the Chair.

*The Question being put, the Motion was **negatived** (Division 1).*

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 The Executive Office

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Megan Fearon, also answered a number of questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

5.2 Infrastructure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)

6.1 Motion – Used Tyres

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the dangerous emission of toxic fumes and gasses into the atmosphere from the public burning of used car tyres; notes that the residue is sent to landfill and still poses an environmental danger; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to establish a used-tyre register to help to regulate and monitor the disposal of used tyres.

Mr O McMullan

Ms L Dillon

Ms C Archibald

6.2 Amendment

Proposed:

Leave out all after 'register' and insert:

"and to work with the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment to introduce an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres."

Mr P McGlone

Mr M Durkan

Mr A Attwood

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Amendment **fell** (Division 2).

The Question being put, the motion was **carried** without division.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.01pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

19 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 September 2016

Division 1

Motion – A Vision for Northern Ireland Outside the European Union

Proposed:

That this Assembly, in light of the referendum decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, endorses and adopts the approach contained in A Vision for Northern Ireland Outside the European Union, published by the Ulster Unionist Party.

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr S Aiken

Mr P Smith

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 15

Noes: 70

AYES

Mr Aiken, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Butler, Mr Chambers, Mrs Dobson, Mr Hussey, Mr Kennedy, Mr McKee, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Smith, Mr Swann.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr Aiken, Mr Nesbitt.

NOES

Mr Agnew, Mr Anderson, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Ms Bailey, Mr Bell, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Ms Bradshaw, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mrs Cameron, Mr Clarke, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Mr Frew, Ms Gildernew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hazzard, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyons, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr F McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McCausland, Mr McElduff, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Miss McIlveen, Mr McMullan, Mr McQuillan, Mr Maskey, Mr Middleton, Mr Milne, Lord Morrow, Mr Murphy, Ms Ni Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Ms Ruane, Ms Seeley, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Ms Sugden, Mr Weir.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McAleer, Mr Robinson.

The following Members voted in both Lobbies and are therefore not counted in the result: Mr Allister.

The Motion was **negatived**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

19 September 2016
Division 2

Motion – Used Tyres (Amendment)

Proposed:

Delete all after “register” and insert:

‘and to work with the Minister for Communication, Climate Action and Environment to introduce an island-wide tyre producer responsibility scheme to monitor the movement and disposal of tyres.’

Mr P McGlone

Mr M Durkan

Mr A Attwood

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 42

Noes: 49

AYES

Mr Agnew, Ms Archibald, Ms Armstrong, Mr Attwood, Ms Bailey, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Ms S Bradley, Mr Carroll, Mr Dickson, Ms Dillon, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Ms Fearon, Mr Ford, Ms Hanna, Mr Hazzard, Mr Kearney, Mr Kelly, Mrs Long, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr E McCann, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCrossan, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McGuigan, Mr McGuinness, Mr McMullan, Ms Mallon, Mr Maskey, Mr Milne, Mr Mullan, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó Muilleoir, Mr O’Dowd, Mrs O’Neill, Ms Seeley, Mr Sheehan.

Tellers for the Ayes: Ms Hanna, Mr Mullan.

NOES

Mr Aiken, Mr Allen, Mr Anderson, Mrs Barton, Mr Beattie, Mr Beggs, Mr Bell, Mr M Bradley, Ms P Bradley, Mr K Buchanan, Mr T Buchanan, Ms Bunting, Mr Butler, Mrs Cameron, Mr Chambers, Mr Clarke, Mrs Dobson, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Frew, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mrs Little Pengelly, Ms Lockhart, Mr Logan, Mr Lyons, Mr McCausland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McKee, Mr McQuillan, Mr Middleton, Lord Morrow, Mr Nesbitt, Mrs Overend, Mrs Palmer, Mr Poots, Mr Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Smith, Mr Stalford, Mr Storey, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wells.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan, Mr Robinson.

The Amendment **fell**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 14 September 2016 - 19 September 2016

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill (NIA Bill 2/16-21)

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

A Draft Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation (DfC).

A Copy of the Draft Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation (DfC).

Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland – Annual Report and Accounts year ending 31 May 2016 (DoH).

Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Charitable Trust Fund Accounts 2015-16 (DoH).

Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service Annual Accounts and Report 2015-16 (DoH).

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

SR 2016/313 The Food Hygiene Rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/314 The Food Hygiene Rating (Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/333 The Domestic Energy Efficiency Grants (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

SR 2016/334 The General Dental Services (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

SR 2016/335 The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoH).

For Information Only

(C.24) SR 2016/328 The Food Hygiene Rating (2016 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DOH).

(C.26) SR 2016/332 The Environmental Better Regulation (2016 Act) (Commencement No.2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DAERA).

7. Written Ministerial Statements

8. Consultation Documents

9. Departmental Publications

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 20 September 2016

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Prayers

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Public Petition

2.1 Public Petition – End the Veto on Marriage Equality

Mr Gerry Carroll was granted leave, in accordance with Standing Order 22, to present a Public Petition calling to End the Veto on Marriage Equality.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement – North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways Sector

The Minister for Infrastructure, Mr Chris Hazzard, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council Inland Waterways Sector, which was held in Armagh on Friday 24 June 2016, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement – North South Ministerial Council in Language Body Sectoral Format

The Minister for Communities, Mr Paul Givan, made a statement regarding the meeting of the North South Ministerial Council in Language Body Sectoral format, which was held in Armagh on Friday 24 June 2016, following which he replied to questions.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion – Japanese Knotweed

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to bring forward proposals for a regional programme to eradicate Japanese Knotweed.

Mrs P Cameron

Lord Morrow

Mr G Middleton

Mr W Irwin

Debate ensued.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4.2 Motion – Roads Maintenance Budget Deficit**Proposed:**

That this Assembly is concerned that the road structural maintenance budget deficit is currently estimated to be £1 billion; notes the importance of road maintenance in terms of road safety, especially in rural areas; further notes that it is estimated that over £137m per annum is needed to adequately maintain, in its current state, the structural integrity of Northern Ireland's road network; and calls on the Minister for Infrastructure to include a ring-fenced allocation to his Department's baseline budget for road maintenance repair that will facilitate a more strategic and, consequently, efficient approach to road maintenance.

Mr G Mullan

Mr R McPhillips

Mr D McCrossan

Mr P McGlone

4.3 Motion – Amendment**Proposed:**

Leave out all after 'Infrastructure' and insert:

"to develop and publish a costed strategic plan for road maintenance and repair that will be included as part of the Department for Infrastructure's ongoing work programme from 2017-18 until the end of the mandate."

Ms K Armstrong

Mr S Dickson

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.57pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Kennedy) in the Chair.

5. Question Time**5.1 Justice**

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Ms Claire Sugden.

5.2 Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, Miss Michelle McIlveen.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Ms Ruane) took the Chair.

6. Private Members' Business (cont'd)**6.1 Motion – Roads Maintenance Budget Deficit (cont'd)**

Debate resumed.

The Question being put, the Amendment was **made**.

The Question being put, the motion, as amended, was **carried** without division.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr McGlone) in the Chair.

7. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

Mr Mervyn Storey spoke to his topic regarding the Future of Health Service in North Antrim.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.11pm.

Mr Robin Newton

The Speaker

20 September 2016

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 20 September 2016

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

SR 2016/336 The Civil Legal Services (Remuneration) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/337 The Civil Legal Services (General) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/338 The Civil Legal Services (Financial) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoJ).

SR 2016/339 The Superannuation (Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman) Order (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoF).

SR 2016/340 The Public Service Pensions (Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DoF).

For Information Only

SR 2016/315 The Hybrid Schemes Quality Requirements (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2016 (DfC).

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 20 September 2016

2016-2021 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
Budget (No.2) Bill 1/16-21	13.06.16	14.06.16	/	/	20.06.16	21.06.16	27.06.16	29.07.16
Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill 76/11-16	12/01/16	25/01/16	/	/	02.02.16	16.02.16	23.02.16	22.07.16
Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill 2/16-21	19/09/16							

2016-2021 Mandate

Non-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

/ Bills progressing by accelerated passage

