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Assembly

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(Hansard)
and
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PROCEEDINGS**

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Official Report (Hansard)

Assembly Sitings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 December 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Speaker: Before we begin today's business, I want to return briefly to an issue that I have raised a number of times: Members not being in their place at Question Time and the unacceptable number of questions that are being withdrawn. The issue was mentioned by our First Minister last week at Question Time and in a point of order by our deputy First Minister. Today, I have written to every Member about the issues. Let me say that my letter is clear on what I expect. I will also raise the issue once again at the Business Committee, reminding the Whips of their responsibility. In my letter, I make it absolutely clear that I am not responsible for ensuring that Members are in the Chamber. That is clearly a responsibility for the parties and the parties alone. I remind all sides of the House where the responsibility lies.

I hope that all parties will make every effort to avoid a repeat of the situation last week. It is for all Members and Ministers to uphold all the rules and conventions of the House and realise the seriousness of the situation. I say to all sides that I will monitor the situation closely. If it continues, I will not hesitate to reintroduce sanctions on Members who are not in their place, especially at Question Time. I hope that that is clear. Let us move on.

Mr Byrne: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. As one of the offending Members who did not turn up last week to Question Time, I apologise. I was caught in the Agriculture Committee. As Deputy Chairman, I was detained there as late as possible to hold on to a quorum. I apologise.

Mr Speaker: I very much appreciate the Member's apology. Sometimes, especially on Monday and Tuesday mornings, we have confession time in the House, and, on occasion, I allow Members to come forward to confess their sins. However, let it be a reminder for the whole House that Question Time is a very important piece of business of the House. Some Members see it as the most important piece of business of the House, especially in holding Ministers to account.

Lord Morrow: Further to that point of order, is it your intention to further analyse the number of questions that have been withdrawn and the number of Members who have not been in their position and to then break those figures down by party?

Mr Speaker: From time to time, all parties are to blame, but I have to say that some parties are worse than others. The Business Office and my office will monitor the situation and will watch carefully to see which Members are absent at Question Time. My ruling and my letter are absolutely clear. We still have Members — Members who

have put down a question — coming up to the Table to withdraw their question, and they then leave the Chamber. Let us be absolutely clear: that cannot go on. I assure Lord Morrow that the whole situation will be monitored closely until we find the culprits and the main offenders.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. In addition to monitoring the asking of questions, will you continue to monitor the non-answering of questions tabled for written answer? I have had questions languishing for 16 months. I know that you have taken an interest in that in the past, but will you extend this exhortation to Members publicly to Ministers so that they will do their duty in answering questions?

Mr Speaker: I hear what the Member is saying. He will know that I have written to the First Minister and deputy First Minister about that issue. Once again, that really is the responsibility of Departments. That is why I have allowed Members to highlight these issues. I have said this morning that there is also a responsibility on Ministers to heed the conventions, procedures and Standing Orders of the House. Let us move on.

Committee Membership: Committee for Employment and Learning and Committee on Standards and Privileges

Mr Speaker: The first two items on the Order Paper are motions on Committee membership. As with similar motions, they will be treated as business motions. Therefore, there will be no debate.

Mr Weir: On behalf of myself and the other Member in whose name the motion stands — both of us are in our places today at the appropriate moment — I beg to move.

Resolved:

That Mr George Robinson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning; and that Mr Ian McCrea replace Ms Paula Bradley as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

Committee Membership: Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Mr Swann: I beg to move, Mr Speaker. I will stay in the House for a wee bit longer than it takes to just move the motion.

Resolved:

That Mr Danny Kinahan replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council: Summit (26 November 2012)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make the following report on the nineteenth summit meeting of the British-Irish Council (BIC), which was held in the beautiful setting of Cardiff Castle, Wales, on 26 November 2012. All Executive Ministers who attended the summit agreed that I should make the statement to the Assembly on their behalf.

The Welsh Government hosted the summit, and the heads of delegations were welcomed by the First Minister of Wales, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The United Kingdom Government were led by the Secretary of State for Wales, the Rt Hon David Jones MP. The Irish Government were led by the Taoiseach, Mr Enda Kenny TD. The Scottish Government delegation was led by the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Infrastructure, Investment and Cities, Ms Nicola Sturgeon MSP. The Government of Jersey delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Senator Ian Gorst. The Government of Guernsey delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Deputy Peter Harwood. Finally, the Isle of Man Government delegation was led by the Chief Minister, Hon Allan Bell MHK. In addition to the deputy First Minister and me, the Northern Ireland Executive delegation included the Minister of Education, the Minister of the Environment and the Minister for Regional Development. A full list of participants is attached to the statement that has been provided to Members.

The summit again provided an important opportunity for member Administrations to develop positive and practical relations on matters of common interest. Through the twice-yearly summits and the sectoral work streams, Administrations continue to consult and exchange information on a wide range of matters and seek to identify new and emerging areas in which such dialogue is likely to be of benefit to all. All parties very much welcomed the opportunity that the summit provided to engage directly on the issues of significant common interest and concern on the agenda.

The key discussion focused on the current economic situation in each jurisdiction, particularly on the role of investment in capital infrastructure in supporting and promoting economic growth. It is clear that all Administrations continue to face significant challenges in managing the implications of the economic downturn in their communities. There is also shared recognition of the importance of infrastructural investment as a lever through which Governments can influence and mitigate the impact of the downturn by sustaining and creating employment and by providing the facilities to attract inward investment. Members will wish to note two other issues of common concern: the continuing difficulty experienced by business in sourcing investment funding from banks; and the high cost of energy, which is an increasingly important factor for companies with plants located in the BIC Administrations' areas and for those making inward investment decisions. Such is the concern about the comparative disadvantage that we have in this area that the summit resolved to return

to the issue for a substantive discussion at its next summit in June 2013.

The Council noted the latest youth unemployment figures for each of the BIC member Administrations and agreed that all BIC work sectors should specifically consider ongoing opportunities to generate employment for young people in their work programmes.

The summit discussed a detailed report on the work undertaken by the early years policy work sector, which is led by Wales. It is clear from the presentations made by each Administration that there is increasing focus on that area. A wide variety of approaches and initiatives were discussed from which all Administrations can learn in developing their own strategies. The Minister of Education, John O'Dowd, reported on developments in early years in Northern Ireland. The Council concluded that investing in early years was critical to creating strong foundations for children and families and recognised the importance of generating better value for money for the public sector by moving from curative to preventative models of service delivery.

Members endorsed the principles that should underpin a common approach to early years — improved educational attainment and improved health and later-life chances — while respecting that each Administration will approach implementation in its own way and at its own pace. The Council noted the significant benefits that have been gained by officials from each member Administration through their participation in the British-Irish Council working group in sharing knowledge, challenges, best practice and research outcomes relating to early years. The Council welcomed the continuation of work in the sector and supported the focus on improving quality, including the critical role of the workforce.

The Council also noted the good progress described in the update reports provided by each of the BIC's 11 work sectors. That work is summarised in the communiqué. This Administration plays a full part in those work sectors. Where Members of the Assembly have an interest in a particular aspect of the work, I encourage them to take it up with the relevant Minister.

12.15 pm

The Council was provided with an update on the work completed to date on the creation of a BIC work sector for the creative industries. A report will be brought to the next summit on the priority areas of greatest interest and value to all Administrations, with a view to the creative industries being formally adopted at the next summit as a new BIC work sector to be led by Jersey.

Finally, the Council noted the secretariat's mid-year progress report, which set out the progress it has made against its business plan.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the deputy First Minister and I were pleased to extend an invitation to the other Administrations to attend the twentieth British-Irish Council summit, which will be hosted by the Northern Ireland Executive in June 2013. We expect that to be held in the city of Derry/Londonderry.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I thank the First Minister for his report. With regard to

the substantive discussion at the next summit about high energy costs, has the First Minister or, indeed, his colleague the Enterprise Minister received representations from any locally based business to the effect that they believe high energy costs represent an existential threat to their continuing to do business here?

Mr P Robinson: I have had meetings with business representatives, particularly those in the west of the Province, who have indicated that their ability to grow is being hampered by energy costs, and they are looking to see what other arrangements can be made. I have spoken to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment about the matter, and she, I think, is in direct contact with them.

I think we all recognise that any company considering coming to Northern Ireland or any company in Northern Ireland that wants to expand has to look at a range of issues, and energy will be one of the costs involved. The extent to which energy will be a key factor depends largely on the nature of the business involved. Clearly, for business, the financial services and so forth, energy is not so much a component part of the overall cost, but for anything related to manufacturing, it can be a major issue.

Mr Moutray: I thank the First Minister for bringing the statement to the House this afternoon. What is his assessment of the current state of the Northern Ireland economy compared with that of the other BIC Administrations?

Mr P Robinson: All BIC Administrations have obviously been impacted by the global recession, some less so than others. The Crown dependencies, for instance, will complain about unemployment rising to nearly 4% and youth unemployment rising to almost double figures. Clearly, those are the kinds of problem that we would be quite happy to face. So, the problem is felt to varying degrees.

Everybody obviously knows about the impact on the Irish Republic. I have to say that there are clear signs that the action taken by the Government in the Irish Republic is having an impact, not least on those who take decisions in the euro zone. Hopefully, the cost of some of the support they have been given will be eased, because what happens in the Irish Republic has a direct impact on our economy. There has been a slowdown generally in our exports to Europe but particularly to the Irish Republic.

In respect of the other devolved Administrations, I think everybody knows that unemployment levels in Scotland, Wales and England are higher than those in Northern Ireland. However, Northern Ireland is still plagued by a very high level of economically inactive citizens. That issue is of particular importance to the Executive, and we are trying to address it through the plans that were recently published.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement. I note his concluding remarks that the next meeting of the British-Irish Council will take place in June 2013. The cynic in me thinks that that has been done to clash or coincide with the G8. Was the point made at the meeting that the continuing pursuance of austerity policies by the British and Irish Governments are having a detrimental impact on our economic growth? Does he feel that there will be a move towards greater investment in capital infrastructure in the near future?

Mr P Robinson: I know there is always a danger that the BIC summit will overshadow the G8, but the answer, I think, is that we can cope with both.

During the last Westminster election, many parties — not all — indicated their concern that the cuts that were being proposed were coming too far and too fast. That was brought home to us when we received the message that our capital budget in Northern Ireland was to be reduced by slightly over 40%. That was a massive cut that had a great impact on our infrastructural development, which feeds into the growth of our economy. The other devolved Administrations had the same feeling.

I think that the coalition Government recognise that there needs to be more funding for infrastructure. The indications during the meeting were that there was likely to be a relevant announcement during the Chancellor's autumn statement. I hope that that will mean the release of more money directly into capital projects or, at the very least, opening new means of getting access to capital funds for infrastructure projects.

Mr Byrne: I welcome the First Minister's statement. Will he enlighten the House further on the situation with the banks? It is fair to say that more and more businesses are feeling the pinch and that overdraft facilities are being cut by local banks. Are further discussions proposed with Ulster Bank, First Trust Bank, Bank of Ireland or Danske Bank?

Mr P Robinson: There are ongoing discussions with the banks, although I have to be honest with the Member and indicate that we can only influence what is done about banking. It is a reserved matter, therefore all we can do is talk to the banks and represent the views of our constituents and businesses in our constituencies and of those who are having massive difficulties maintaining their business because of cash flow difficulties that are often brought about by the fact that the banks have reined in and reduced the level of overdrafts and made terms more difficult. We will continue to do that, although the Executive have attempted to offer assistance by setting up their own business loan fund under DETI. I understand that a considerable number of companies have been in contact with DETI and that funds are starting to flow out of that account. In many ways, however, it is sad that government has effectively had to take on the role of a bank because of the inability of the banks to do what they were set up to do.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the First Minister for his statement. The First Minister has raised on a number of occasions the issue of educational underachievement, and he raised it again in the statement. What type of best practice was discussed at the summit in relation to that issue?

Mr P Robinson: Each Administration gave their own view on youth unemployment. Early years education flows into that. There is a clear view that early years education better prepares young people for a working environment at a later stage. We have taken initiatives under our Delivering Social Change policies that, along with what DEL and DETI are doing, will considerably improve the situation.

We have recognised the joined-up nature of what is required in this area. That includes what we have been doing to improve parenting skills, mentoring in primary and secondary schools for those who are lagging behind, through to the skills and training base that we are building. All of that must work together. It is not simply a case of

taking one thing and saying that it will resolve the problem. It will, perhaps, be many years before we see the full benefit of all those initiatives.

According to the most up-to-date youth unemployment figures, the rate for those aged 18 to 24 in the UK as a whole is 19.4%. Northern Ireland is under that average at 19.2%, whereas Scotland and Wales are up at 22%. I do not take comfort in the relative distinctions that there might be. The fact that over 19% of our young people are unemployed is totally unsatisfactory. However, to some extent, you have to view that against the backdrop of the economic downturn and unemployment more generally. If employers can pick and choose, they pick people with the greatest level of experience, which, very often, is older people. Therefore, it is up to us to make sure that we skill people up so that they have skills and talents that may not be available to the existing workforce or people who have been in the workforce.

Mr Givan: I thank the First Minister for his statement. I know that he recognises the importance of investment in our infrastructure to try to mitigate the downturn in our economy. In the event that we receive additional resources from the Chancellor in his autumn statement, will the First Minister assure us that the Executive will continue to invest those moneys into capital projects that generate the highest level of jobs?

Mr P Robinson: Each Department will have objective criteria that determine what their capital priorities will be. In some cases, the capital priorities of a Department will lean towards issues other than the amount of employment that might be produced. It might also, in respect of roads, be dealing with where there are accidents or problems. A number of factors have to be taken into consideration. A very considerable and important factor will be the employment consequences. Indeed, the deputy First Minister and I communicated with all our Ministers to ensure that they were prepared for any upturn that there might be in capital spend or our ability to draw down funds through private and other sources. That requires Departments to have shovel-ready schemes, so that they do not hear that there is a tranche of money available to us and then start wondering how they can get planning permission through and how they can get legal issues and design features resolved. All those things need to be ready so that we are ready to go if more funds come our way.

Mr Swann: I thank the First Minister for his statement. The Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee is undertaking quite an extensive inquiry into the creative industries. The biggest challenge has proven to be that it is quite a diverse sector. Is there anything specifically that the Northern Ireland Executive will promote and focus on to enhance our creative industries in Northern Ireland?

Mr P Robinson: The deputy First Minister and I have been very supportive in BIC of opening up that new work stream. It is a sector that has grown very considerably in Northern Ireland. Tens of thousands — I think that it is about 20,000 — of people are now employed in one section of the sector or another.

Of course, the definition of creative industries will include things from architecture through to film making and everything in between, including music and many of the other skills. However, we have had a particular interest in the television and film sector. There are now hundreds of

jobs at our Titanic Studios. We invested in a second studio, and we are having negotiations on the construction of a third studio, so successful has that been. We will look at what other BIC areas have to say about the priority areas in the creative industries. Given the cultural diversity that there is in Northern Ireland and the interest in culture in Northern Ireland, culture and the creative industries have a remarkable future in the Province. I am very committed to ensuring that it is taken up as a work stream, albeit one that will be led by Jersey rather than us.

Mr G Robinson: I ask the First Minister how unemployment figures compare with other BIC members, particularly youth unemployment. What steps have been taken to address these issues? He may have answered part of the question earlier.

12.30 pm

Mr P Robinson: Northern Ireland's unemployment rate is 7.6%, and the UK average is 7.8%. The levels of unemployment in England, Scotland and Wales are all above that of Northern Ireland, but we are the fourth lowest of the 12 regions of the United Kingdom for employment generally.

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

The figures that I outlined earlier for youth unemployment are the most up to date and again show Northern Ireland as being below the UK average of 19.4%. We are at 19.2%; Scotland and Wales are at 22%; and England is at 19%. However, the factors that do not come into play with the unemployment figures are the economically inactive. That lends support to our case for a new initiative to rebalance our economy. That is why we continue to press the Government on corporation tax, which has the potential to be a game changer.

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the First Minister's statement to the House. Most important, it is also welcome that BIC will meet in my constituency during the City of Culture year.

I acknowledge the quite serious unemployment figures in Northern Ireland, and, in particular, the fact that we have over 40,000 young people who are not in education, employment or training. Is the First Minister content that the fullest co-operation and formal collaboration is taking place between Departments to help in that area?

Mr P Robinson: I very much welcome the fact that we will be able to host the next BIC summit. It coincides with the UK City of Culture, and I trust that we will be able to give our guests some of the culture that will be around the city when they come. We are finalising the venue at present. Hopefully, we will be able to give them the benefit of the UK City of Culture while they are there.

I do not think that I will ever be content with the interrelationship between Departments, but I have to say that it has improved very significantly. I believe, for instance, that the Education Minister will make a statement tomorrow about early years. Again I say that, because of joined-up government, one thing leads into the other, and one has an impact on the other.

The Departments are working together on this issue. You saw a number of initiatives brought forward under Delivering Social Change by the deputy First Minister and me that will have a direct impact on helping young people to get into employment. After our last Executive proposal

to aid the economy, the Minister for Employment and Learning took the opportunity to bring forward a series of initiatives to help young people to skill up, train and be ready for employment. So DETI, DEL, OFMDFM and some of the other Departments are working together to look at one issue. It is disturbing, it has to be addressed, and, although we are at a lower level than the UK average, it is still unacceptably high.

Mr Allister: I note from the communiqué that, in discussing the economic situation, there was a particular focus on the important role of investment in capital infrastructure as a means of supporting and promoting economic growth. In that context, what discussion and what progress — or otherwise — has there been at this summit or at previous summits on essential improvements to the A75? That is a vital entry point or gateway for Northern Ireland's freight and for promoting our economy in the rest of the United Kingdom. Is there a focus on that, and is there any progress to report?

Mr P Robinson: In the margins, the deputy First Minister and I have had discussions with the First Minister of Scotland on the issue. We continue to press for it. Obviously, the Scottish Government will determine their own priorities, but it is a high priority for us. As the Member said, it is an essential route to the British mainland. It is important for our businesses, particularly those in the haulage industry who use it as an entry point into GB and across to Europe. So, it is important. We will continue to put pressure on, although that is difficult when there is restraint on capital spending. The Scottish Government's priorities would obviously change if they had more funds available. If such an announcement were made and if there were a change in how capital funds are drawn down using the private sector, it may become timely for us to renew that interest with them.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I return to the question of the creative industries possibly becoming a new work sector. I presume that, given the First Minister and the deputy First Minister's recent display of artistic aspiration, it is timely to have this as a possible and undoubtedly very welcome new sector that is well led by the deputy First Minister and the First Minister. Given that it is a possible new sector, will the First Minister confirm that the Executive will do all in their power to continue to support it because of its newness and importance, to which the Minister referred?

Mr P Robinson: We will. We have taken a special interest in that sector, which I think has grown considerably during the period of this Executive. For instance, an architectural company was part of the delegation on our visit to China. It does business out in China, and, when I came back, I had a message from it to indicate how helpful the visit had been in tying up further clients for the company. So, as in all aspects of the creative industries, I think that innovation is part of Northern Ireland people's genes. We have seen that with some of the great research and development that we bring to the Province and in some of the great inventions that have come from Northern Ireland. So, that creative spirit in the Northern Ireland persona is such that I think that there is a great future for us in the creative industries, and we will do everything possible not only in the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister but through our other Departments.

Executive Committee Business

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call junior Minister McCann to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill.

Moved. — [Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill at this stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded.

Charities Bill: Further Consideration Stage

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call the Minister for Social Development to move the Further Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill.

Moved. — [Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development).]

Mr Deputy Speaker: As no amendments have been tabled, there is no opportunity to discuss the Charities Bill at this stage. The Further Consideration Stage of the Bill is, therefore, concluded.

Jobseeker's Allowance (Members of the Reserve Forces) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Members of the Reserve Forces) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The regulations were laid before the Assembly on 9 July 2012. They are being introduced to enable jobseeker's allowance claimants who are members of the armed forces reserve to attend their mandatory 15-day annual training without needing to terminate their claim for jobseeker's allowance. Before the introduction of the legislation, a claimant who was a member of the reserved forces lost entitlement to jobseeker's allowance when they attended their 15-day annual continuous training. That occurred as they were unlikely during such periods to meet the basic job-seeking conditions of being available for and actively seeking employment. The jobseeker's allowance claim can now be kept open while they are on training, as they will be treated as being available for and actively seeking employment during the period of training. In addition, in order to passport entitlement to full housing benefit, reserve forces members can now retain entitlement to income-based jobseeker's allowance when they receive payment for their participation in annual training. To guarantee that, a minimum amount of jobseeker's allowance of 10p a week will be maintained.

Members of the lifeboat service, the Fire and Rescue Service and others engaged in emergency duties for the benefit of others are also required to undertake training throughout the year. However, that usually takes place at weekends or evenings to fit around volunteers' work and other commitments. As a result, there is no adverse effect on their jobseeker's allowance claim. Only the reserve forces have a compulsory requirement to attend an extended period of training. The changes will ensure that they are not treated less favourably than those in the other volunteer groups that I mentioned. We are therefore addressing that anomaly without creating an adverse impact on other voluntary groups.

I believe that it is unnecessarily cumbersome and time-consuming for claimants and my Department to terminate awards of benefit and then require new claims to be made when training has ended. The changes are entirely beneficial and will generate less disruption for reservists, who will no longer be required to end their claim to jobseeker's allowance and then make a repeat claim when their training has ended.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing forward the regulations. The Committee gave consideration to the original SL1 pertaining to the statutory rule at its meeting on 21 June 2012 and was content for the rule to be made. The Committee gave further consideration to the rule at its meeting on 6 September 2012 and, subject to the Examiner of Statutory Rules' report, recommended that it be confirmed by the Assembly. In support of the arguments that the Minister has laid out before the House, the Committee is content to support this.

Mr Copeland: Both I and my party warmly welcome today's statutory rule, as it represents a step towards greater equality for members of the armed forces. Not only does it show greater recognition of servicemen and servicewomen by the Assembly and the coalition Government but, on a solely practical level, it should greatly reduce the cumbersome arrangements that have pertained heretofore.

The reserve forces, the Territorial Army, the Royal Naval Reserve and the air force and its reserve have a crucial and increasing role to play in the defence of the nation. The territorials and reserve forces are well trained and highly disciplined. They are an effective unit of people, all the time remaining ordinary members of the public but with a drive to serve their country further. On top of that, in their day-to-day life, they of course have their job and their family. Members of the reserve forces are expected to participate in a rigorous training regime, including drill nights, weekends away and one obligatory training period for annual continuation or continuous training. It is that training course specifically that the change will address.

People on jobseeker's allowance must already meet a long list of criteria, not the least of which is to be willing and able to take up employment immediately. At present, reservists are paid approximately £532 for their training, which is the equivalent of a fortnight's intensive work. Previously, reserve force recruits and people on the establishment needed to stop claiming their jobseeker's allowance entirely for the period of training. Today's rule, however, means that they will simply be given 10p of allowance for their time away as a training entitlement. We should welcome the change, which I do, and we should recognise the increasing requirement for territorial and reserve forces. I have no hesitation at all in adding our support to the envisaged move.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased by the consensus across the Assembly for the regulations. I thank the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for the positive way in which they dealt with the matter.

The reserve forces are, as has been already stated, an important element of the United Kingdom armed forces, and it is only right that we take the regulations forward. I thank Members for their interest in the regulations and hope that they will, as indicated, back them. The changes will benefit all jobseeker's allowance claimants who are members of the reserve forces when they are required to attend their annual training. Only the reserve forces have a compulsory requirement to attend an extended period of training, and these changes will ensure that they are not treated unfairly when compared to other groups who volunteer for emergency duties for the benefit of others. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Members of the Reserve Forces) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

12.45 pm

Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next two items of business are motions to affirm statutory rules that deal with matters related to irresponsible drinks promotions. There will be separate debates on each of the statutory rules. However, the Minister and Members will be allowed some latitude in the first debate to address the broad policy issues that are common to both sets of regulations. I hope that the House will find that helpful.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

As you are aware, Mr Deputy Speaker, I have been expressing my concern for some time about the way in which alcohol is promoted and marketed. In particular, I am concerned about promotions involving very cheap alcohol and its availability to young people.

Alcohol misuse damages people and costs everyone money — up to £900 million a year in Northern Ireland, according to a report commissioned by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. In 2011 alone, 252 people in Northern Ireland died directly because of alcohol misuse. Each of those deaths is a personal tragedy for the family and friends of the individual concerned.

Recent legislation gave my Department the power to ban irresponsible drinks promotions. During the passage of the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, a commitment was given that the detail of regulations to tackle irresponsible drinks promotions would be consulted on in advance of them being made. A public consultation ran for eight weeks on proposed regulations to ban certain irresponsible drinks promotions. The consultation sought views on the detail of regulations for two types of drinks promotions: fixed price offers, such as "All you can drink for £20"; and the sale of alcohol containing two or more intoxicating liquor products. In that instance, for example, a retailer operating off-sales would not be able to sell a package of two bottles of wine for less than £8 if one bottle cost £4.

The consultation showed strong support for the proposed regulations from local councils and those involved in promoting public health. The Social Development Committee expressed doubts that a ban on bulk purchases would have the desired effect. Having considered the result of the consultation and the views of the Committee, I have decided to proceed with the introduction of the regulation to ban fixed price promotions such as "All you can drink for £20". However, I have decided against proceeding with the introduction of the regulation to ban bulk purchases at this time.

The ban on fixed price promotions will make this type of promotion, which encourages harmful and excessive drinking, illegal for the first time. These promotions encourage young people to buy and consume more alcohol than they normally would and need to be stopped. The introduction of this regulation, together with a properly enforced drinks industry code of practice, will put an end to some irresponsible behaviour by licence holders.

I am aware that legislation of this nature will not solve problem drinking on its own. We must continue to support public health education campaigns to raise awareness of the impact of the abuse of alcohol. Early intervention by health professionals can also help identify and help potential problem drinkers.

Subject to affirmative resolution, the regulation will become effective from 1 January 2013.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing forward the regulation. As the Minister has outlined, there has been considerable engagement between the Department and the Social Development Committee, and that is as it should be. People are concerned that there is a binge-drinking culture out there that is very harmful to our broader society and particularly to those who are directly engaged in it. We understand that there is no single answer. We also understand that there are mixed views on how to tackle the issue. That is why the Committee expressed reservations about the possibility of unnecessary legislation or regulations being brought to bear on the matter. However, the Committee fully supports these regulations on irresponsible drinks promotions for the reasons that the Minister outlined.

The Committee is mindful of the harmful impact that this activity has on the people who are directly engaged in it. We often hear the term “When the drink’s in, the wit’s out”. That may well be the case, but we also know that it is much more harmful than that in many cases. We understand the implications for the health of the individuals concerned and for the well-being of society in general. On that basis, the Committee supports the regulations.

Mr Copeland: I, too, rise to welcome the proposed changes. I was not a Member of the House when the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Act went through the legislative process. However, it would be remiss of me not to make some reference to the Members who had the foresight to request the report initially and to the Department for acting on that report in the way it has. I do not need to remind Members of the several tragic deaths, one of which happened earlier this year and was a stark reminder to us all of the effect of cheap alcohol promotions.

As we know, the regulations being discussed today seek to ban drinks promotions that are said to be irresponsible, such as the “All you can drink for £20” promotion that has been mentioned. While we do not want to ruin anyone’s fun or good time — that is what these things start out as — people must accept that countless and endless vodka shots at £1 a time for someone who may already be under the influence of alcohol will do little to make the night any better. Rather, if we limit reckless promotions, fewer people will, we hope, end up in our accident and emergency units or the cells at the end of an evening out.

A Health Intelligence briefing on the use and cost of alcohol in Northern Ireland, which the Minister referred to, reported that alcohol misuse generates overall social costs of £679·8 million — a not inconsequential amount of money. It brings added costs in healthcare, social work, fire, police and safety services, courts and prisons. All of that has an impact on the wider economy. It starts as a good night out. On many occasions, it ends up as a good

night out, but, on many other occasions, it ends up quite the opposite.

The report also noted that alcohol was 66% more affordable in 2009 than in 1987. The health and social well-being improvement section of the Public Health Agency reported that alcohol has never been more affordable or more available. Stable alcohol prices mean that it is now 65% more affordable to buy drink than it was 20 years ago. The rise in the use and consumption of alcohol is striking, and we are all aware of the huge increase in binge drinking over recent years. These things do not happen by accident. They happen through promotion, marketing and design. Surely it is incumbent on us as legislators to take effective action against the effects of these promotions.

For those reasons and many others that I do not intend to go into, I welcome regulations such as those before us today. I ask the Minister for reassurance on one point about the regulations. Can he give detail of the discussions that there have been with groups such as Pubs of Ulster to ensure that the industry is prepared for whatever changes flow from the regulations? I also draw his attention to an issue that I have spoken about from this corner in the past, namely cocktails that come in quart jugs with funny names like Black Russian and a whole lot of other stuff. Because those things are mixed on the premises, there is absolutely no indication on the jug of the strength of the alcohol that it contains. They tend to be available more often in restaurants, but I can tell you from personal knowledge that they can pack a heck of a punch when you least expect it.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased by the consensus across the Assembly for the introduction of regulations to restrict fixed price promotions, such as “All you can drink for £20”. We have been reminded, over the course of the debate, about the growing awareness of the damage and the tragedies associated with alcohol abuse and its cost to our society. It is not just the £900 million that I mentioned; it is the emotional impact and trauma for families who lose a loved one. Earlier this year, in one particular instance, that was very much highlighted in the media. If you follow the newspapers on a regular basis and look at the stories that appear, it is clear that we have a serious issue in our society. The impact on hospitals and the emergency services has a cost. There is also an impact on the people who work in emergency medical services and the cost of policing the results of alcohol abuse. All those things are detrimental to our society.

I trust that this will be an important initiative. Through conversations and discussions with Pubs of Ulster, I know that there is a desire on the part of the vast majority of retailers to behave responsibly. However, there are some who behave irresponsibly, which is why we need interventions such as this. No single measure will solve the problem, but this is one of a number of measures that can contribute to an improved situation, I hope, over the next period of time — this initiative and the next one, in terms of regulations, and other things that are being looked at, particularly in co-operation with the Minister of Health. I am pleased to commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

The issues that Members have just heard about in relation to licensed premises are issues that also relate to registered clubs. Registered clubs provide sporting and other activities in our communities and have a good record of complying with the law. However, in the interests of consistency between the licensed trade and clubs, I also intend to introduce a ban on fixed price promotions such as "All you can drink for £20" in registered clubs. Subject to affirmative resolution, the regulations will become effective from 1 January 2013.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for bringing forward this set of regulations. On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I confirm that we support the regulations. We do not need to rehearse any of the arguments that have been put forward already.

Suffice it to say that the Committee recognises that the vast majority of those in the drinks industry are responsible people and responsible businesses. By the same token, there are a minority who have been engaged in irresponsible drinks promotion behaviour, and we ask those people not to consider ways of circumventing these regulations.

On behalf of the Social Development Committee, I pay tribute to the family and the loved ones of the late Joby Murphy, whose tragic and very untimely death as a result of an irresponsible drinks promotion brought this problem very clearly to the public's attention. I thank the family and commend them for, in the midst of their grief, managing to continue to work publicly to highlight the problem.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased with the consensus across the Assembly for the introduction of regulations to restrict fixed price promotions, and I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

1.00 pm

Private Members' Business

Human Trafficking: GRETA Report

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The proposer of the motion will have 10 minutes in which to propose and a further 10 minutes at the end of the debate to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Lord Morrow: I beg to move

That this Assembly welcomes the report from the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA); and calls on the Minister of Justice, along with Executive colleagues, to implement the recommendations in the GRETA report which relate to Northern Ireland.

I am very glad that I have the opportunity to open this afternoon's debate on the GRETA report on the implementation in the United Kingdom of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.

The Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 3 May 2005. It followed a number of other initiatives that had been taken forward by the Council in trying to find the best way to combat trafficking in human beings. The convention came into force in the UK on 1 April 2009 and is a legally binding instrument that builds on other international legislation in that area. GRETA, the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, is tasked with evaluating the implementation of the convention by the parties to it. It is made up of 15 independent and impartial experts chosen for their recognised competence in the fields of human rights, assistance and protection of victims, and action against trafficking in human beings.

The report that we are considering today is GRETA's first report on the United Kingdom's compliance with the convention. It was published on 12 September, and on 13 November, the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings adopted recommendation CP(2012)10 on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings by the United Kingdom, which recommended that the British Government implement the GRETA proposals listed in appendix 1 to the report concerning the implementation of the convention by the United Kingdom. I am glad that, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first debate on the subject of the GRETA report among the United Kingdom's legislators.

I will first highlight areas in which the Minister and his Department have made welcome steps on the GRETA report. Paragraph 97 of the report stresses the importance of formalised arrangements with NGOs and civil society to discuss and co-ordinate the application of anti-trafficking policy in Northern Ireland. I am glad that the Minister has responded to that recommendation and introduced an NGO engagement group. I hope that that body will be able

to make a real difference to helping victims of trafficking on the ground and improving co-ordination among the burgeoning NGO sector in that area. Paragraph 255 outlines that NGOs met by GRETA were not aware of any leaflet that outlines the rights and entitlements of victims of trafficking and indicates that victims did not receive information from their first contact with the authorities on the relevant judicial and administrative proceedings. The Department of Justice, perhaps as a consequence of that, has sought to produce, in conjunction with Amnesty International, a leaflet outlining the rights and entitlements of victims of trafficking. That step is welcome. It is also positive that, as the report outlines in paragraph 352, there are no plans to remove legal aid for immigration cases, including trafficking in human being cases. It is good that the removal of legal aid is not on the table as it seemed to be for a period in England and Wales.

I should add that the GRETA report's comments on the quality of the Women's Aid shelter in Belfast reflect the fact that Northern Ireland has an excellent standard of care for female victims of violence and trafficking. Paragraph 267 describes the shelter as being of a high standard and having very good common facilities. The Department of Justice's close relationship with Women's Aid should be commended. However, it must be noted that the GRETA report is not entirely positive about the work of the Department of Justice on combating human trafficking. Paragraph 132 outlines that concerns have been raised about the lack of reliable data on adult and child victims of trafficking in Northern Ireland. Different bodies are involved in collecting data, but there is no central data collection and analysis point, which is crucial for enabling planning policies to protect and assist victims of trafficking. That is certainly a matter of real concern when it comes to our looking to shape our policy responses in this area.

The report goes on to consider the effectiveness of the Blue Blindfold campaign, and it notes that an evaluation of the campaign in Northern Ireland showed that approximately 500,000 adults were aware of it. Of those who saw the advertising, 60% agreed that they knew something about human trafficking, 75% agreed that it is an issue in Northern Ireland and 84% agreed that they would call Crimestoppers or the PSNI if they were suspicious that human trafficking was taking place. However, the report also noted that NGO partners in Northern Ireland have:

"questioned the level of awareness in the population and the impact of the campaign."

Paragraph 225 on page 53 of the report suggested that there is, reportedly:

"some confusion as to which First Responders can act and make referrals into the NRM."

In addition, it appears that recognised first responders in Northern Ireland are unclear about the proper process of referral.

In paragraph 311, which is on page 70, the report goes on to outline that GRETA understands that:

"in Northern Ireland some potential victims of trafficking from EU countries who were referred to the NRM were repatriated two to four days after the referral."

That concerns me greatly. Vulnerable victims of trafficking who have been referred to the national referral mechanism (NRM) need to be supported effectively. That is not facilitated by deporting victims soon after they have been identified. What will the Minister do to ensure that that practice does not happen again?

The report identifies a further problem. Paragraphs 332 and 333, which are on page 75, state that:

"According to information provided by the Law Centre Northern Ireland, victims of trafficking have been prosecuted and detained in Northern Ireland before it was established whether their involvement in unlawful activities had been due to coercion. ... GRETA understands that there have been cases of victims of trafficking arrested, prosecuted and convicted in relation to migration and non-migration offences, including child victims of trafficking arrested and convicted for cannabis cultivation."

GRETA is concerned about the high number of potential victims of trafficking who are detained. There are no data on the number of potential and confirmed victims of trafficking who are detained. Again, I find that situation deeply concerning. These individuals should not be being prosecuted, and they need to be protected. What will the Minister do to ensure that they are?

Paragraph 353 on page 79 of the report outlines that:

"there have been only two successful prosecutions for THB offences in Northern Ireland, which has a detrimental impact on victims and fails to provide them with the option of claiming compensation from the offender in the framework of a criminal trial."

I submit to the Minister that, given the scale of trafficking in Northern Ireland, this state of affairs is completely unacceptable and requires a step change.

The GRETA report makes 35 proposals for the British authorities, of which the Northern Ireland Executive are one, to consider. That means that GRETA takes the view that, to achieve the best possible compliance with the convention, we need to make changes in those 35 areas. There is not time for me to reflect on them all today, but I will mention some of the most important as I consider the challenge of implementation.

The challenge of how best to implement the outstanding GRETA recommendations is key, because this happens to come at the time that the Minister introduced a Criminal Justice Bill. That Bill proposes changes to the legislation in the area of human trafficking, and, although those changes are welcome, they do not implement a number of the GRETA report's proposals. I appreciate that that was due to the fact that the Criminal Justice Bill was produced and published before the GRETA report. However, now that the Minister has had the opportunity to consider the GRETA report, he should look at amendments to the Criminal Justice Bill as a means of implementing outstanding GRETA recommendations.

A further vehicle that could be used is the private Member's Bill that I have proposed for the Assembly's consideration. The convention's provisions have heavily influenced the definition of my Bill, and a number of the Bill's clauses would help to bring Northern Ireland into line with the GRETA report's recommendations.

Recommendation 1 of the GRETA report articulates the conviction that the constituent countries of the United Kingdom must be guided by a human-rights-based, victim-centred approach. The anti-trafficking convention is fundamentally a human rights convention. My Bill continues in that vein. It contains extensive provisions to ensure that victims are cared for appropriately, as well as seeking better provision for prosecution. Those are outlined in clauses 5(3) and 8.

Recommendation 22 in the report proposes that there be provision of legal guardians for potential child victims of trafficking. Clause 11 of my Bill rises to that challenge through having legal advocates provide both a consistent advocate for the best interests of the child and a complex care and legal system.

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

Lord Morrow: Those legal advocates, it must be noted, are quite different from guardians ad litem, who provide a different role.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin supports the GRETA recommendations. They are progressive and comprehensive, and therefore we support the motion.

From the outset, I wish to put trafficking into context. It is important to stress that human trafficking highlights social inequalities, both in the countries from which those trafficked come and the countries of destination.

The trafficking of human beings is a violation of human rights. It is perpetrated by individuals and organisations solely for the purpose of profit. Basically, it is the poorest and most vulnerable people from societies, particularly women and young people, who become the majority of those trafficked. Thousands of people are trafficked each year within the EU. Nearly 800,000, in one form or another, are trafficked globally. Many are forced to work in the sex industry, forced labour, domestic services or criminal activity, and, in some cases, people have their organs removed for sale.

Victims are often trafficked to a foreign country where they cannot speak the language. They have their travel and identity documents removed. The International Labour Organization estimates that the profits from trafficking worldwide are in excess of \$32 billion each year. It is the third most profitable crime and comes closely behind that of trafficking drugs.

Human trafficking is nothing short of modern-day slavery, but it assumes a different mantle from the slavery of 200 years ago. Then, it was a part of everyday life, but today's slavery, in the guise of human trafficking, is more hidden from the public gaze. As President Obama aptly put it, human trafficking is:

"barbaric and it is evil, and it has no place in a civilized world."

Although there is no evidence of a major human-trafficking problem in the North of Ireland, or indeed on the island of Ireland as a whole, that does not mean to say that it is not happening in a significant way. A scoping study compiled by the Equality Commission in 2009 on the nature

and extent of human trafficking in the North of Ireland concluded:

"In general, few cases of trafficking ... are detected, few victims are identified and protected, and few perpetrators are actually prosecuted and convicted."

Hard information about human trafficking in the North of Ireland is scarce. As I said earlier, trafficking is a hidden problem and understandably difficult to measure or quantify. You do not get to hear about it until something happens. Often victims will not divulge any information, because they are scared or distrust those who are trying to assist them. That is why I want to support the implementation of the GRETA recommendations around the issues of training relevant professionals, having a more focused campaign of information and awareness-raising, and strengthening the role of labour inspections.

As I said at the outset, the GRETA recommendations are radical and progressive in the process of tackling this crime, which has a devastating effect on so many human beings.

Mr Elliott: I welcome the motion and apologise to Lord Morrow for missing most of his introduction. I heard the last bit of it. He is working on the issue on his own behalf as well as for the Assembly and, indeed, everyone who is affected by it.

I must say right from the outset that human trafficking is wrong. Every possible action should be taken to stop it happening and to prevent it from happening in the first place. It becomes even more difficult and relevant when we hear of the children who are involved in it.

1.15 pm

Quite a number of GRETA's recommendations talk about co-ordination, co-operation, supporting one another and agencies working together. If one message comes out of this, it should be that agencies in the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and, indeed, those in wider Europe and the rest of the world, need to work together and have a co-ordinated approach between the security services, customs and all the relevant agencies. It is imperative to listen to those who are impacted; those individuals and the agencies and authorities that know what is happening on human trafficking.

I have heard some horror stories from those who have seen people being brought into Northern Ireland. We may think that this does not happen in Northern Ireland, but we would be wrong. Human traffickers bring people into Northern Ireland and, where possible, that must be prevented.

I am grateful to the Ulster Unionist Party's MEP, Jim Nicholson, who is the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group co-ordinator for the special committee on organised crime, corruption and money laundering. The committee considered human trafficking throughout the European Union and produced a paper on the issue in September 2012, which looked specifically at preventative actions and stressed that the issue was particularly serious when it involved children. That goes back to my initial point about children.

One of GRETA's recommendations is to work with the Children's Commissioner in Northern Ireland, and I think

that the Children's Commissioner here would be very receptive to that and very helpful. We can have all the reports and acknowledgements that we want but, unless there is action on the ground and a proper co-ordinated approach, they will not work. None of the reports will come to fruition unless we have that co-ordinated approach, and I hope that we can have some organisation or some body to look at the issue. I am interested in hearing what the Minister of Justice has to say, whether he and his Department will take the lead, and who they will co-ordinate and co-operate with. Obviously, the security services will be a key aspect, and social services and the Children's Commissioner are vital. However, we must have a co-ordinated approach if we are to achieve any fruitful outworking of the recommendations.

It would be interesting to see how other countries deal with the human trafficking issue and whether additional laws would be required here. The Justice Bill, which is at Committee Stage, focuses quite a lot on human trafficking, and I hope that it can be strengthened more to help and support those who are being trafficked in Northern Ireland and in the rest of Europe. I know that there has been some debate about whether those who break the law on human trafficking inside and outside Northern Ireland can be charged or convicted if they carry out those acts outside Northern Ireland and where that charge or conviction would take place.

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

Mr Elliott: The Ulster Unionist Party is happy to support the motion. I look forward to everyone in the House supporting it.

Mr A Maginness: I commend Lord Morrow and his colleagues for bringing forward the motion, which calls for the implementation the recommendations in the GRETA report from the Council of Europe that relate to Northern Ireland. The SDLP welcomes the opportunity to debate the report. Trafficking in human beings is a global criminal activity that requires global and local responses to tackle what is believed to be a growing problem. I have no doubt that it is a growing problem.

This is the first GRETA report on UK compliance with the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, which came into force in the UK on 1 April 2009. I believe that this is, as Lord Morrow said, the first Assembly on these islands to specifically debate the GRETA findings. At the core of the GRETA report is the conviction that we must be guided by a human-rights-based, victim-centred approach. That should remain centre stage in the debate and in any actions that follow from the Minister.

On 7 February 2012, the Minister of Justice told the Assembly:

"if the report makes recommendations, I will take them to the relevant justice agencies to ensure that we maintain our position at the forefront of dealing with this crime." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 71, p171, col 1].

The Department of Justice is to be commended on the steps that it has taken with regard to some of the recommendations outlined in the GRETA report. A new NGO engagement group on human trafficking has been

set up, and the Department has sought to produce a leaflet outlining the rights and entitlements of victims of trafficking. Guidance has been produced on welfare and the protection of adult victims of human trafficking. Although generally welcome, those measures need to be completed, and may still fall short of their stated intentions.

Other recommendations of the GRETA report remain to be implemented. Some Members, including the proposer of the motion, may believe that a private Member's Bill exists that would progress the implementation of those other recommendations. That may or may not be the case. We will debate the merits of that Bill, if and when it comes before the Assembly. I commend Lord Morrow for his work in relation to that matter.

GRETA was particularly concerned that more effort should be made to discourage demand for the services of trafficked persons for the purpose of domestic servitude and labour exploitation, including in the agriculture, fisheries, construction, hospitality and cleaning sectors, and that more should be done to raise awareness about internal trafficking and those trafficked abroad, with special emphasis on the trafficking of children.

Specifically stated in the GRETA report was concern about the lack of reliable data on adult and child victims of trafficking here in Northern Ireland. GRETA points out that there is no central data collection and analysis point. Such a central point is crucial for planning policies intended to protect and assist victims of trafficking. Therein lies a weakness.

I welcome the fact that the GRETA report identifies some good practice here with regard to tackling human trafficking. The measures taken by the Department will help to address some of the shortcomings that remain. Amongst those shortcomings is the concern that victims of trafficking have been prosecuted and detained before it was established whether their involvement in unlawful activity had been due to coercion.

The report makes recommendations on a UK-wide basis, as well as for the devolved Assemblies. The Minister must co-ordinate his response with other Parliaments and Assemblies, not only with the devolved Assemblies but with the British and Irish Governments. Human trafficking is a problem for all of us on these islands, North and South. Given the shared jurisdiction of the island, there is a real need for a co-ordinated all-island approach to tackle the trafficking of human beings. The Minister should be actively lobbying the British Government to implement the recommendations —

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

Mr A Maginness: — as well as progressing those recommendations it is within his ability to deliver.

Ms Lo: Human trafficking is not only a criminal offence but a gross violation of the human rights of its victims. I welcome the opportunity to speak on an issue that I have long campaigned against. I support the motion and thank Lord Morrow for bringing it to the House.

Although the GRETA report notes the advances that the UK has made in tackling human trafficking, it sets out what work still needs to be done. Most of the action points are specifically for the consideration of Westminster. Others directly or indirectly concern us here in Northern Ireland. The first recommendation of the report is that the

authorities should address the consequences of having numerous pieces of legislation on human trafficking and ensure that all types of human trafficking are included and applied in full conformity with the Council of Europe convention.

Our legislative framework comprises a number of laws, and there is a need for a co-ordinated and coherent approach to human trafficking. The Republic of Ireland has a specific piece of legislation, which is the Criminal Law (Human Trafficking) Act 2008, but there is no evidence to say that a single piece of legislation may make it easier for the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) to bring prosecutions and for the courts to pass longer sentences than we have seen so far to the perpetrators.

There is no doubt that we need clear definition and strong legislation to tackle this crime. Therefore, I welcome the PPS commitment to issue guidance on human trafficking offences early next year, in line with another of GRETA's recommendations on issuing guidelines.

GRETA urges authorities to ensure that all victims of trafficking under 18 years of age be considered as child victims of trafficking within the meaning of the European Convention. That is already the case in Northern Ireland, and it is the duty of the social care trusts to look after child victims. The all-party group on human trafficking recently heard from Barnardo's and the NSPCC highlighting the problem of internal trafficking, with emphasis on children. All too often, we are only adult-focused in addressing human trafficking, forgetting the importance of public awareness regarding trafficking of children.

One other recommendation is a continuation in developing a comprehensive and coherent data collection system on trafficking in human beings. It is suggested that that is done by compiling statistical information from all main actors and allowing disaggregation concerning sex, age, type of exploitation, country of origin and/or destination, etc.

In September, I attended a parliamentarians against human trafficking seminar in London, where I was particularly struck by a pilot scheme instigating a pan-European monitoring scheme on trafficking in human beings. The scheme collects data from five different countries, highlighting the social and economic profile of victims and offenders, as well as the geographical context. That helps to act as an early warning system and maps out where human trafficking is most prevalent. Human trafficking is of a transnational nature, and we know that Northern Ireland is not only a destination country, but a transit route between us and the South. I gave evidence recently to the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly committee's inquiry on human trafficking, and I made the point that there needs to be more collaboration on information sharing between the other two countries, as Alban has just mentioned.

The report also deals with compensation, training officials, evaluating authorities' responses, ensuring the right toolkits are in place, collaboration with NGOs, recovering and reflection period, and the protection of witnesses and victims, all of which demand our attention and efforts to review our practice and findings to strengthen our approach.

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

Ms Lo: In terms of compensation, we need to look more closely at confiscation of criminal proceeds from the traffickers to help not only fund victim compensation, but increase the capacity of the voluntary sector, which is well placed to support victims.

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

Mr G Robinson: Human trafficking is defined as the acquisition of people by improper means, such as force, fraud or deception, with the aim of exploiting them.

That definition is sickening and undermines the essential fact that no human being is a commodity or profit-making tool. We must all be aware that behind the statistics and definitions are real people. It must also be remembered that the criminals who traffic people do not care about age, gender or, indeed, anything that is linked to an individual. They see only how much money they can make by the cruel exploitation of the people whom they treat as slaves.

1.30 pm

It is the traffickers, not the victims, whom we should punish. That is why the low conviction rate for perpetrators must be addressed as a matter of urgency by whichever joined-up agencies can eradicate that horrendous and sickening crime once and for all. To remove trafficking is to reduce the overall problem. I urge the Minister of Justice to seek an urgent review of the current system and the introduction of a system that removes those cruel and heartless people from society.

The victim is the person who suffers most, be that physically, psychologically or both. Let us remember that people from other countries, many with poor English and little understanding of how to escape their plight, are also victims of that evil trade. That is wrong. The victim must be the most important person in any legal process to tackle human trafficking. I hope that the Justice Minister will agree with me on that point. That will then give definitive impetus to the changes that are required to current legislation. I appreciate that things take time. However, if we can speed up the process, I urge that that approach be taken.

As I stated, we must remember that the issue is about vulnerable people who are in the control of criminals who have no regard for the people whom they subject to what is modern-day slavery. I fully support the motion that was brought to the Chamber by my colleague Lord Morrow.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún. I support the motion.

I want to outline some of the shortcomings that have been pointed up by the GRETA report, some of which have been referred to so I do not need to go into them in any great depth. I want to make my case that they are matters of concern. Ba chóir dúinn aird a thabhairt ar na cúrsaí seo. We need to pay attention to those details.

There is an issue with the lack of data and a centralised function for collation of data. That must be addressed if proper planning is to be put in place to deal with an insidious crime in this country and throughout the world.

It was pointed out that a leaflet was being put together to give information to victims so that they have all the necessary relevant information about their rights and

the assistance to which they are entitled. However, there does not seem to be much awareness of that leaflet. People have not been made aware of its existence. It is unclear whether it actually exists. If it has not already been developed, it needs to be fast-tracked so that people have the relevant information that they need to get the assistance that is crucial to their case. It must be in a language that they understand.

The fact was raised that there are a number of pieces of legislation to cover human trafficking. It has been suggested from many sources that it would be better if all of them were pulled together under one piece of legislation. That also needs to be considered.

With regard to the 45-day period of reflection for victims, I do not believe that a limit should be set. It must be borne in mind that people are traumatised by their experiences. It is not really possible to know what a person has been through in any given case, so limiting the period of reflection and time for consideration does not help. It should be more flexible.

Special account must be taken with children who are victims of trafficking so that they are dealt with in an atmosphere and setting that are appropriate for them. The people who deal with them should be adequately trained and professionally qualified to be able to deal with children. That is so important. We just need to be sure that all that is in place.

GRETA has produced many considerations and points about assistance to victims in general that, I think, we can agree with and take cognisance of. I will highlight some of those points. The report states:

“GRETA considers that the authorities of the UK and the constituent countries should make further efforts to ensure that all potential and actual victims of trafficking are provided with adequate support and assistance from their identification through to their recovery. This should involve ... adopting clear support service minimum standards for victims of trafficking”.

It also states:

“Competent Authorities officials ... need to respect this period as defined in the Convention. Potential victims of trafficking should be systematically informed of the implications of this period, in line with Article 13 of the Convention.”

We need to ensure that, where appropriate, access to compensation is available and that victims and people who have suffered because of human trafficking are aware of their entitlements. They need to be made aware of their legal right to financial assistance, accommodation, legal aid and anything else to which they are entitled. It has to be made absolutely clear that all that is available, and we need to ensure that it can be clearly seen.

We have to bear in mind that most trafficking victims who come to the North and to other parts of the world —

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

Ms McCorley: — will have language issues. Mar fhocal scoir, ba mhaith liom tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo agus do na moltaí atá sa tuarascáil GRETA.

I commend the motion.

Mrs Hale: I am glad that I have the chance to contribute to this afternoon's debate. I commend the Members who tabled the motion, which brings the GRETA report to our attention.

The report raises some crucial issues with regard to how we respond to the heinous crime of human trafficking in Northern Ireland. Like other Members, I state my support for the comments that Lord Morrow made in his opening speech on the motion. I agree with him that the Minister of Justice and his Department have taken positive steps in the area and have made a real difference to victims on the ground. The Minister should be commended for the steps that he has taken. However, it is patently obvious that the Department of Justice needs to go much further.

As I have only five minutes, I will focus on one issue, that of forced labour, referring particularly to GRETA recommendation 16, which is concerned with addressing the demand for services provided by trafficked people, especially those who are trafficked for labour exploitation. I will also focus on recommendation 26, which addresses the need for proper assistance and support for trafficked people.

In considering forced labour, I think that it is important to examine the excellent work that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation does in that area. In 2011, a report that it commissioned from the Institute for Conflict Research highlighted very graphically the reality of forced labour in Northern Ireland today. The report demonstrates that it is a particular problem for some in the fishing industry, agriculture, domestic work and other areas of casual work. Like sexual exploitation, some people who are subjected to forced labour have been trafficked, in the narrow sense of the word, into Northern Ireland, while some have not. Lord Morrow argued that, courtesy of the UN special rapporteur on trafficking, all forms of selling sex meet the demands of trafficking because of the abuse of power that is involved. I think that an identical point can be made about forced labour, where the person is abused even if they have not been trafficked, in the narrow sense of the word, into Northern Ireland.

The Institute for Conflict Research report pointed to a number of different ways in which control can be exerted against vulnerable individuals. First, it can be done by threatening actual physical harm to the worker. The report found evidence of a number of cases where individuals in Northern Ireland have been threatened with actual violence to force them to work.

Secondly, control can be exerted through the restriction of movement and confinement to the workplace or to a limited area. That includes fishermen who were confined to their ship as their transit visas did not allow them to live on land and others who were advised to stay in indoors as the town they lived in was dangerous.

Thirdly, control can be exerted through debt bondage. That includes a worker having to pay off a debt or loan and, therefore, not being paid for their labour. The report noted that it was not unusual for Polish or Filipino migrants to have to pay fees to agencies in their home countries to secure jobs in Northern Ireland.

I think that every Member would agree with me saying that these practices cannot be tolerated in our society. The

evidence uncovered in the 2011 report into forced labour in Northern Ireland is truly shocking.

I suggest three measures. The first two are mindful of GRETA recommendation 16 and the third is mindful of recommendation 22. In approaching the first two, I recognise that, on the basis of the national referral mechanism figures, the principal driver for trafficking to Northern Ireland is sexual exploitation, and it is vital that we work harder here. As Lord Morrow pointed out, the current offence of paying for sex with someone subjected to force has not resulted in a single conviction. Something needs to be done, and I commend clause 4 of Lord Morrow's Bill as a best way forward.

Although I am focusing on forced labour, I regard trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced labour as being equally unacceptable. We need to work harder to address the challenges that they both present.

The Department of Justice should develop an annual strategy on raising awareness and reducing trafficking, as suggested in clause 13. That should include data collection to facilitate effective monitoring of human trafficking, and therein forced labour, in Northern Ireland. Secondly, I strongly urge the Minister to look at the practical measures that would reduce demand for forced labour. One should start, as GRETA recommendation 16 suggests, with additional resources for inspections of private sector business in the high-risk areas of fishing, agriculture and domestic servitude.

Finally, I suggest that the Minister of Justice amend the Criminal Justice Bill to enshrine in law the need to support victims of trafficking and forced labour. Lord Morrow's Bill does not provide such support to victims of forced labour who have not been trafficked, so I urge him to consider amending it to include support for such victims of forced labour.

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

Mrs Hale: That would ensure that for the first time in the United Kingdom victims of forced labour who have not been trafficked in the narrow sense of the word have access to the support and assistance that they will need. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms McGahan: Sinn Féin believes that the most effective crime policies — the ones that have the capacity to deliver real community safety — focus on prevention. That requires a twin-track, front-end approach, dealing squarely with the individual and systemic causes of crime, complemented by other measures proven effective to deter crime.

It is important that we have real, effective measures to combat human trafficking and protect the victims of that odious crime. Sinn Féin has been critical of initiatives that assume that all human trafficking is sex trafficking, which is not the case. Around the globe and across Ireland, significant numbers of people are trafficked to work in the domestic sector as well as in the agriculture and catering industries. A key recommendation of the GRETA report is that all types of trafficking in human beings be included, and applied in full conformity with the Council of Europe convention.

Greater attention also needs to be paid to the trafficking of children, as mentioned in the GRETA report, for not only sexual exploitation and forced labour but begging and petty theft. It is important to ensure that, in line with

the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the best interests of the child should be paramount in all actions taken on trafficked children. A child's right to privacy must be respected, and the views of children should be sought and taken into account.

'Trafficking in Persons Report', published in 2005 estimated that approximately 600,000 to 800,000 men, women and children are trafficked across international borders each year. Approximately 80% are women and girls, and up to 50% are minors. Trafficking for sexual exploitation of women and children must not be seen simply as a problem faced elsewhere in the world. It is happening here.

We need to develop an all-Ireland strategy ensuring PSNI and gardaí co-operation to combat and prevent the trafficking of people into the sex industry, bonded and forced labour, forced marriages, and so on. We also need to ensure that the protection of the human rights of trafficked persons is a priority in all policies and practices related to human trafficking, including offering a full range of protection and support measures as well as medical, professional and legal assistance that addresses the particular needs and risks faced by the individual and, where applicable, members of their family. As was alluded to in the GRETA report, we need to improve and increase investment in prevention efforts based on good quality research that also examines the links between poverty, migration, discrimination and trafficking. I support the motion. Go raibh maith agat.

1.45 pm

Mr Agnew: I welcome the motion, and I commend the proposer for bringing it to the House. Indeed, I welcome the increasing focus that the Assembly is putting on human trafficking. Since I was elected, this is the second debate that we have had on the issue. We have also had the establishment of the all-party group on human trafficking, and, as Members are aware, Lord Morrow is working on a private Member's Bill on the issue.

I do not want to dwell on the seriousness of the crime of human trafficking too much. Many Members have outlined that. It is one of those issues that is hard to do justice to. When you hear the stories of victims of human trafficking, you can use many superlatives; I would certainly say that it is horrendous. I am thankful that we are focusing on not the numbers but the severity of the crime. We are unsure of the number of victims involved, but we know the number of people convicted. It may be small, but given the nature of the crime, we cannot be aware of the number of victims who are undetected. Due to the severity of the crime and the serious and damaging impact that it can have on people's lives, it is getting an increasing focus in the Assembly and in the priorities of the PSNI.

I welcome the GRETA report. It is a valuable contribution to tackling human trafficking. One of the issues that has been alluded to but on which I would like to focus is immigration and how the UK Border Agency treats the victims of human trafficking. I appreciate that this is not within the powers of the Assembly, but I would like to make the points to the Minister and hear from him how he engages with the Immigration Minister and the UK Border Agency on the issue.

As Members will be aware, victims of trafficking have a 45-day period of reflection in which to assist police with their enquiries and take part in any legal proceedings. I appreciate that this can be extended if legal proceedings are under way and their contribution is needed. However, as a standard, the 45 days is insufficient. I am concerned — and again, I would be interested to hear the Minister's views — that, as things stand, victims of human trafficking face the risk of becoming victims of our immigration system as well. As Members will be aware, when a victim of human trafficking is deported back to their country of origin, there is often the possibility at the other end that they will become, once again, the victims of human trafficking. We must do all that we can to ensure that that is not the case and that victims are offered every support possible from our statutory agencies.

The Criminal Justice Bill has been alluded to. I hope that the Minister will take cognisance of the recommendations in the GRETA report. There has been much talk in those recommendations and in the contributions today of the need for collaboration across agencies, borders and seas. I hope that, given the work that is being done by the Justice Minister and Lord Morrow, we will see collaboration on their part as well to ensure that the best of Lord Morrow's Bill and the best aspects of the Criminal Justice Bill are at least complementary. Perhaps the Minister will take on some of the best aspects of Lord Morrow's Bill to ensure that we get the legislation right. As has been pointed out, it is key that legislation is clear. Having one piece of legislation rather than two simultaneous pieces could make that right. As I said, we need the best aspects of both, whether that is separate or in a single Bill. I think that a single Bill would be preferable, as long as we get it right. That has to be the key thing.

Mr McNarry: At the outset, I want to associate myself and UKIP with the comments that Lord Morrow made in opening the debate.

I want to focus on recommendation 22 of the GRETA report, which outlines that British authorities, including the Northern Ireland Executive, should ensure that:

"all unaccompanied minors who are potential victims of trafficking are assigned a legal guardian."

That is an eminently sensible proposal, and I am pleased to see that clause 11 of Lord Morrow's Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill contains such a provision.

Child trafficking guardians — or "legal advocates" as they are helpfully designated in Lord Morrow's Bill to avoid confusion with the term "guardian", which has a different meaning in our law — address a very real problem, which is not distinct to Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom. In the context of the hugely daunting, soul-destroying, complex bureaucratic demands to which child victims of trafficking are subject, as they are bounced from one state agency to another, children become exceptionally vulnerable to re-trafficking. Child trafficking guardians address the presenting challenge by providing a constant point of contact for trafficked children, accompanying them in all their visits to state agencies and speaking on their behalf if the child wishes them to, so that they do not have the trauma of having to repeatedly recount the horrors of their ordeal to different officials. I apologise for my sore throat. According to our Minister, however, legal advocates

are unnecessary, because guardians ad litem are sufficient to promote the well-being of trafficked children. I disagree.

The International Organization for Migration has stated:

"The Guardian-ad-Litem is not a child advocate so that it would not increase the professional services to which a child victim would have continual access."

It continued that guardians ad litem:

"would not increase their needs provision socially, psychologically, linguistically or educationally."

I strongly urge the Minister to reconsider his position on that. The idea of a legal advocate has widespread support in the House and among many NGO groups that work with trafficking victims in Northern Ireland. I especially note, as has Lord Morrow, that the Northern Ireland Children's Commissioner is in favour of such legal advocates. The principle is, of course, also strongly supported internationally, hence general UN endorsement, in addition to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) definition and GRETA's intervention. Surely trafficked children, who are some of — if not the — most vulnerable individuals who come to our shores, deserve to be supported by some sort of guardian for trafficked children or legal advocate as per Lord Morrow's Bill.

As Lord Morrow has mentioned, on 7 February 2012, the Minister stated:

"I assure Members that if the report makes recommendations, I will take them to the relevant justice agencies to ensure that we maintain our position at the forefront of dealing with this crime." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 71, p171, col 1].

On behalf of those children and the House, I ask the Minister to listen to one of GRETA's proposals and change course.

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I congratulate Lord Morrow and his colleagues on tabling the motion, and for giving the Assembly the opportunity to debate this important issue again in the context of the GRETA report.

As Lord Morrow highlighted, I believe that this is a first for any of the UK legislatures, and he should take some pride in that. As has frequently been said in the House, including today, human trafficking is one of the most appalling of crimes. It can involve foreign nationals being tricked into coming to Northern Ireland for a better life, only to be trapped into, for example, domestic servitude, forced labour or sexual exploitation. It can also involve trafficking within the United Kingdom. It has the most profound effect on victims. I am not sure whether many MLAs were at the Lyric Theatre last week to see the play 'Diablo', performed by theatre company Spanner in the Works. It compressed into five characters what goes on in trafficking. I am not sure that all Members would necessarily have appreciated the language that was used in the play, but it was a forceful statement of what trafficking means for human beings; it was something that merited wider attention.

As we know, because we have referred to it here before, 33 potential victims of human trafficking were recovered in Northern Ireland in 2011-12, and seven since April this year. We believe that there are others who have not been recovered. From my role as Chair of the Organised Crime Task Force and through my engagement with MLAs and

NGOs, I know that the issue is extremely emotive. I want to tap into that emotion and the enthusiasm that comes with it to maximise society's efforts against this wicked crime. Only by working in partnership and by taking a holistic approach across the three fronts of prevention, protection and prosecution can we tackle this successfully. It is a cross-cutting issue for which my Department has the lead but others, particularly the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), have responsibility, and all Departments must play their part.

The motion is specifically about the report published by GRETA on the implementation of the Council of Europe convention by the United Kingdom. That report was published on 12 September and can be summarised by quoting the words of GRETA president, Nicolas Le Coz, who used much the same terms as those used by many Members this afternoon:

"The UK has clearly made significant progress in fighting human trafficking since the Council of Europe convention came into force, but there is still work to be done in a number of areas."

GRETA looked at compliance with the convention, and a group of experts visited Northern Ireland to take evidence. The convention is a detailed document that sets out a number of standards for prevention, protection and prosecution. It covers the responsibilities and work of a number of agencies, both devolved to Northern Ireland and, as immigration is not a transferred matter, UK-wide authorities here too.

My Department has been working to ensure that we are compliant with the EU directive on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims by the deadline of 6 April next year. For example, I have, as Members said, brought to the Assembly a Bill that addresses the two key areas where we need to bolster the offence provisions. A detailed table setting out the view on compliance with the directive has been provided to the Justice Committee. The work in connection with the directive and on strengthening our approach to human trafficking is ongoing.

It is worth highlighting a couple of issues there. I have asked officials to consider whether or not human trafficking should become an indictable-only offence, in other words triable only in the Crown Court. In addition, I have asked them to consider whether the Department of Justice should introduce regulations that put the support for victims required by article 11(5) of the directive on a statutory basis. Support for victims during the recovery and reflection period has been in place since April 2009. It is currently provided through a contract with Migrant Help, to the value of £145,000 per annum. A statutory basis is being considered to see whether that would be appropriate.

Other areas of work are ongoing too, including, for example, training by statutory agencies, which I have highlighted previously, with work being done by the Public Prosecution Service, the UK Border Agency and by the PSNI to bring their staff up to date with an online trafficking package. Raising public awareness is an important area in which we have conducted research to focus our approach. As Members have said, I recently announced the establishment of an engagement group on human trafficking, under the umbrella of the Organised Crime

Task Force. This is made up of representatives from a number of NGOs, as well as officials from my Department, the Police Service and the health and social care sector. The group's main purpose is to facilitate engagement between NGOs and government on human trafficking; to share information; and to provide a way in which NGOs can assist government and law enforcement agencies in their work in tackling human trafficking. The group will hold its first meeting on the thirteenth of this month.

The GRETA report makes a number of proposals. Only one of them is specific to Northern Ireland. Proposal 33 states that the Public Prosecution Service should "promptly issue guidance" on human trafficking offences in Northern Ireland.

The guidance was issued for consultation in June, and, following consideration of consultee comments, the PPS will formally issue the guidance early in the new year. Some of the other proposals are not relevant to Northern Ireland. A number of them are, and they are being considered by the relevant Departments and other agencies. My Department made a commitment to the Justice Committee to report to it on the GRETA report, and that is scheduled for the new year.

2.00 pm

I now turn to Members' comments. I will first state my appreciation of the way in which comments have been made this afternoon. It is rare that Departments are recognised for good work, although almost every Member who paid compliments then felt the need to go on to refer to other issues that need to be addressed. Let me deal with some of the issues that were highlighted.

Lord Morrow, backed by nearly everybody who spoke, highlighted the importance of ensuring proper data. The relevant paragraph in the report refers to the developing work of the Causeway data system. There is also a Home Office group, which my Department is part of, looking at how data is handled in an appropriate way across the UK. The immigration and human trafficking subgroup of the Organised Crime Task Force is looking at the issue. The issue of first responders was handled in the Government's response, which is published with the report.

Concerns were raised about some people being repatriated too early. That would undoubtedly cause me concern, if there was evidence of people being repatriated against their will, but, for some people, early repatriation is desired and is appropriate in those circumstances.

Lord Morrow also highlighted the arrests of trafficking victims. On some occasions, the law enforcement agency may think that an arrest is appropriate because of information that it has at a particular time. However, it is also the case that the PPS has, on a number of occasions, directed that no prosecutions be made, which suggests that the issue is being properly addressed.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Mr Elliott referred to wider issues of co-ordination, and I assure him that I fully accept the need for ensuring that partnership is built. That is why one of the key bits of work of the Organised Crime Task Force is done through the immigration and human trafficking subgroup, which has representation from all relevant agencies, including on a cross-border basis. That is where we ensure co-ordination.

Agencies are left to carry out their own formal duties, but the subgroup ensures that the work is held together in an appropriate, co-ordinated and joined-up way. Similarly, the interdepartmental ministerial group, led by the Home Office, ensures that level of co-ordination across the UK. On a similar point, I assure Alban Maginness — I do not wish to go too far into a statement that I am due to make to the House later — that at last week's meeting of the intergovernmental agreement on criminal justice co-operation, Alan Shatter and I again discussed human trafficking because it is a concern to both jurisdictions on this island.

Rosie McCorley and Steven Agnew raised the issue of whether a single piece of legislation would be beneficial, which was disputed in what I regarded as a helpful intervention by my colleague Anna Lo. All I can say to the House is that the law enforcement agencies have not said to me that they see a need for a single consolidated piece of legislation. They believe that the current legislation is adequate and there is no need to consolidate all legislation at the moment. Rosie McCorley also mentioned her concerns about the 45-day reflection period. As Members know, that can be and frequently is extended, although I suspect that her desire to have no limits is perhaps not realistic. However, I agree entirely with her that it should be extended when necessary. Just as those who wish to be repatriated early should be, those who require a reflection period of longer than 45 days should be able to benefit from that.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Minister for giving way. He said that the reflection period should be extended “when necessary”. Does he agree that that should be when it is necessary for the victim, not just for our legal system?

Mr Ford: Absolutely. The period of reflection is for the benefit of the victim, and its extension should be for the benefit of the victim.

I have responded to a number of key points. I have had a number of meetings — for example, with the immigration Minister in the Home Office — relating to the way in which UKBA operates. I have visited its facilities in Belfast and Larne. Reasonable measures are being put in place. The detention facility in Larne is the only place that I have heard about where clients from any aspect of the justice system have expressed their appreciation to those who look after them. That must be an indication that some of these difficult issues are being handled sensitively. David McNarry raised other issues relating to the way in which children are looked after. However, those are, frankly, more for the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety than for me, and Mr McNarry may wish to take those matters further with him.

As I have just said, the GRETA report advises a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to tackling human trafficking. I believe that, in Northern Ireland, that is evidenced by the presence of the range of bodies that we have on the OCTF immigration and human trafficking subgroup, including the Garda Síochána, the Gangmasters Licensing Authority and other UK-wide bodies. So, I think that that is a measure of the point that so many Members made about joining matters up.

There is no doubt that trafficking is an important issue for this society. As I have said before, it is one into which my Department puts a great deal of resource and effort and

rightly so. The Department of Justice will continue to work to consider ways of improving the collective response on the issue. It will do that with the OCTF partners and, as Members highlighted, the new engagement group with NGOs.

We have debated the issue in the House before, and I suspect that we may well debate it again. Today, however, in the context of the GRETA report, I welcome the fact that we have had the debate and the constructive manner in which it has been handled around the Chamber. I assure Members that their remarks, including those to which I have been unable to refer in the time allowed, will be reflected on in the Department.

I support the motion, which, I believe, reinforces the Department's approach. However, as I said in my summary, I fully acknowledge that it indicates that more work remains to be done here as it does in the other three UK jurisdictions. The Department of Justice is working hard on this, alongside DHSSPS in particular. With the formation of the engagement group with the non-governmental organisations, we hope to extend that reach further.

I welcome the attention that the House has paid to the issue, and I welcome the motion. I commit my Department to continuing to progress the issue on all three fronts: prevention, protection and prosecution.

Mr Weir: I welcome the fact that we have had the opportunity to debate the motion. As the Member who moved it indicated, this is the first opportunity anywhere in these islands to debate the issue in the context of the GRETA report. Indeed, we are the first jurisdiction to do so, and that does credit to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

I will take this opportunity to pay tribute to Lord Morrow, who moved the motion. He has been at the forefront of the issue and has helped to drive it forward. I welcome the fact that we have had a debate across the Chamber that has been constructive, as the Minister indicated, and in which there was universal support for the motion. I should particularly commend David McNarry, who, I was going to say, by the sound of him nearly avoided his own wake to be here today. For a while, I was concerned about whether he would make it to the end of his speech, but he fought on bravely to complete his five minutes.

Mr McNarry: I will send you an invitation to my wake.
[Laughter.]

Mr Weir: Absolutely.

Human trafficking comes in many forms. We heard about exploitation in the sex industry and exploitation in the fishing and farming communities and a range of other areas. Brenda Hale said that it can come about in different circumstances, such as the threat of violence, limits to the areas in which people can work or debt bondage. Given those variations, as we debate the policies and strategies that we need to pursue, we should bear in mind George Robinson's remarks. He said that, ultimately, behind all the statistics and the evidence, we are dealing with real people who are in real suffering. We should always keep that at the forefront of our mind.

It is also the case that, although a lot of good work has been done to raise awareness, too many people still believe that this is someone else's problem and it does not have an impact in Northern Ireland. I must say the

opposite of what Neville Chamberlain said: this is not happening in a faraway country about which we know little; this is happening on our doorstep. We need to recognise both what happens in Northern Ireland directly and, as a number of Members highlighted, the fact that Northern Ireland can act as a sort of transit camp that is used as a gateway to other parts of the United Kingdom or to the Republic of Ireland.

The motion aims to highlight the work of GRETA and the background to its report. A number of Members, including Lord Morrow and Alban Maginness, highlighted a lot of the good work that is ongoing. There is no attempt to have a go at the Department of Justice, even on the points about which we disagree. We welcome the ongoing work. We welcome the establishment of the task force to look at this with full involvement; the joint work that has been done between the Department and Amnesty on the production of the leaflet; and the reassurances that have been given on legal aid. As the Minister agreed, the thrust of this is that significant progress has been made. That progress is ongoing, but it is clear that there is still work to be done.

A common theme expressed by Seán Lynch, Alban Maginness, the proposer, Brenda Hale and Rosie McCorley is that, in dealing with the issue, we need to concentrate on data. If we are to crack this problem, we need to ensure that collective work is done on it. As Brenda Hale and the proposer highlighted, although considerable work has been done on awareness, we need to help raise awareness further. As the proposer indicated, the issue of clarity around first responders needs to be tackled.

As the proposer, Tom Elliott, Rosie McCorley and Steven Agnew indicated, we need to ensure that the action that we take to deal with victims of human trafficking does not help to revictimise them. A number of Members mentioned the opportunity to ensure that compensation is available. We need to tackle that as well.

A number of Members, including Tom Elliott and Anna Lo, specifically mentioned the impact on children. Bronwyn McGahan gave figures that indicated that 80% of victims were women and girls and 50% were minors. Therefore, it is important that, when looking at the problem, we do not concentrate simply on adults but include children. As Tom Elliott pointed out, the key test of that is action on the ground. As David McNarry said, there is a need to ensure that we take the right way forward and that, within the procedures, there is a legal advocate for those children. At present, there is a system of a guardian ad litem. However, the UN, UNICEF and GRETA have all indicated that there needs to be a very solid form of protection advocacy for children. The Children's Commissioner has also highlighted that. Although a guardian ad litem may provide some support to vulnerable young children, it is not the same as a legal advocate. That needs to be taken on board.

Legislation was mentioned. There was perhaps slight disagreement over whether a single piece of legislation was needed or whether the work that can be done under the Criminal Justice Bill and Lord Morrow's Bill can act in tandem. I take slight exception to the mention of guidance and guidelines. Guidance and guidelines are very good as far as they go; however, there is a clear need for legislation. Guidance, in and of itself, cannot be necessarily binding, because it may or may not be

implemented consistently. Guidance can then sometimes be changed without proper Assembly scrutiny. The approach of guidance makes it difficult for a victim to challenge a decision through judicial review. Finally, if we limit ourselves purely to guidance, there is a danger that we send out a signal that we do not deem this to be of sufficient priority. This has to go beyond guidance and into the realms of legislation.

We need to ensure that there is proper prosecution. As Brenda Hale and the proposer mentioned, there needs to be that protection. For example, the present law on sex workers has meant that having sex with someone who has been exploited through trafficking has not resulted in a conviction as yet. That is one of the areas of my colleague's Bill that I commend.

One of the other consistent themes in the debate was the need for co-ordination. There is a clear determination to have that level of co-ordination, and we need to ensure that that is borne out in actions. A number of Members — Alban Maginness in particular — mentioned the need for collaboration between jurisdictions. As indicated, we are talking about something that affects 750,000 people across the world and is a particularly significant problem in the European Union. So, we need to work on a North/South, east-west and cross-Europe basis to provide co-ordinated responses. I was glad to hear the Minister give a degree of assurance that that is being done.

It is clear that there is a unified voice coming from the Assembly on how to deal with what Mr Lynch called this modern-day slavery that is hidden from the public gaze. There is a determination to send out a clear signal. The key test for all of us will not just be whether we can unite around a motion but whether we can implement the recommendations of the GRETA report to ensure that the greatest level of bearing down is pressed upon this modern evil in Northern Ireland. We must ensure that this scourge can be removed from our jurisdiction. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly welcomes the report from the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA); and calls on the Minister of Justice, along with Executive colleagues, to implement the recommendations in the GRETA report which relate to Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Order. The next item of business on the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 2.16 pm.

On resuming —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

FM/DFM: Visit to China and Hong Kong

1. **Mr Irwin** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what opportunities exist following the recent visit to China and Hong Kong. (AQO 2991/11-15)

3. **Mr Dunne** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on development opportunities following their recent trip to China. (AQO 2993/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 1 and 3 together.

We visited China following an invitation from senior Chinese Government Ministers to help to strengthen government relations, particularly in economic development, education, research and technology. During our visit, we met diplomats and businesspeople, who all stressed the economic opportunities that exist for our businesses in China. In all our meetings, we were advised that we need to build a strong relationship in the future, which will require further visits and economic missions to China.

On this visit, we led an economic mission of over 30 organisations, and the feedback from all the participants was very promising. Our involvement helped to raise the profile of our businesses to potential buyers and business influences in China. During the visit, we announced new business deals for Glenarm Organic Salmon, orders worth £1 million for Carrickfergus company Yelo, and we also facilitated a contract signing between software designer Texthelp from Antrim and the China Education Alliance. We also expect more business deals to be announced over the coming months.

Education is also an important contributor to economic growth. We visited Shanghai Jiao Tong University, which has a strategic alliance with Queen's University Belfast, and saw the benefits of the joint £2.3 million science bridge project, which strengthens research links in the field of sustainable energy. We met the Financial Secretary of the Hong Kong Government and discussed a number of possible economic opportunities for the future.

We also hosted the NI Connections event to reach out to our diaspora now living in Hong Kong and China, and met over 100 people who have agreed to help us in our efforts to identify opportunities and grow our economy in international markets.

We met the directors of the Kowloon Motor Bus Company, which uses buses supplied by Wrightbus. That provided us with an opportunity to support that company's business growth efforts in Hong Kong.

Another objective of our visit was to promote our tourism offering. We met four organisations, including the European golfing tour and commercial sponsors of the USB Hong Kong Open to discuss possible future projects.

The visit has gone a long way to building our relationship with China. We plan to return next year for a series of meetings with senior Government Ministers to explore further opportunities across a number of important sectors.

Mr Speaker: I remind the deputy First Minister of the time limit. Sometimes, Ministers may want more time when the nature of a question demands it. Ministers who need more time may ask for it, and it is not an issue for the House.

Mr Irwin: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Like many others, I wish to congratulate the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) on the trade mission to China.

In my constituency, there is a successful software company called First Derivatives, which has created many jobs in Newry. Will the Minister state whether any development opportunities have been realised in that regard as part of the visit?

Mr M McGuinness: Not too long ago, the First Minister and I visited First Derivatives in Newry. It is an incredible company. We also went on to open its new office in New York. It is obvious that First Derivatives has a wide reach throughout the international community, so I would be very surprised if there were not further opportunities for a company such as it in the future in the Chinese market.

China is opening up to the international community, and the fact that some 350 businesses from here have travelled to China over the past six years suggests that there are incredible opportunities. It will not suit every company, but it is a perfect fit for a company such as First Derivatives.

Mr Dunne: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Will he advise the House what follow-up action is being taken by agencies such as the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest NI in relation to the visit?

Mr M McGuinness: I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Invest NI, Arlene Foster, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and, indeed, Michelle O'Neill, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. They were with us on the visit to China, and they understand the importance of building those relationships. When Madam Liu Yandong came to Belfast, I think that it was a clear signal that China recognises that building relationships with this part of the world is very important for them.

The First Minister and I were very pleased to accept the invitation from the Taoiseach to go to Dublin to meet Vice-President Xi, who has since been announced as the new leader of China and is due to take office in, I think, March next year. So, I think that it is hugely important for DETI and Invest NI to build on the contexts that are now clearly there and on the opportunities that are clearly opening up. Something like over £100 million of trade went from here to China last year, and I think that it is clear that that can be built on. There will be a huge responsibility on Invest NI and DETI to seize every opportunity that comes their way. I think that the contacts with the Ministers that we hope to meet next year will further boost that effort.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answers. I note that he talked about meeting diplomats and businesspeople, but there was no talk of meeting politicians. Given that the Chinese party congress coincided with your trip, do you accept that you did not get within 1,200 kilometres of anybody of any real political significance? Is that why the taxpayers have to fund a return trip so early in the new year?

Mr M McGuinness: I think that it is obvious from that that the view of the deputy mayor of Larne that the Ulster Unionist Party is in tatters is clearly an indicator of the ignorance of the question that was asked. The reality is that the trade mission to China was organised well before the Chinese communist party convention was held. At that stage, the First Minister and I agreed that we would lead the delegation and be part of it. It was not our fault that the Chinese communist party decided to change the date for its event. The advice that we received from diplomats on the British and Irish side was that the First Minister and I should still go. I think that it was a very important first entry to China and that the opportunities that that presents to us are unlimited. That was a very small-minded question from the leader of a party that is now, clearly, much smaller than it was previously.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Will he outline any plans for a return visit to China?

Mr M McGuinness: Yes, there are plans for a return visit to China. I think that the fact that Madam Liu Yandong issued the invitation to the First Minister and me is a very clear indicator that we need to go back. When we decided to undertake the mission to China, we spoke with a number of people who are acutely aware of what is required to build relationships in China. The advice that we received was that you do not go once to China; you have to build relationships with the Chinese political leaders and the Chinese business community. There is an art to that. That art is well made in a book published by, I think, Trinity College Dublin, which clearly indicates the way in which businesspeople from this part of the world should approach the way that they build contacts with the Chinese business community.

So, yes, it is very important to go back. The Chinese market is huge, and there are incredible opportunities. The University of Ulster recently opened the Confucius Institute, an event that Madam Liu Yandong was there for. Given that Queen's University and the University of Ulster, as well as dozens and dozens of businesspeople from all over the North and from all over the island of Ireland, recognise that they have an opportunity to increase trade to China, we would be very foolish not to try to build on the relationships that we have begun recently.

Ms Lo: I am very pleased that the deputy First Minister visited my homeland. I hope that he thoroughly enjoyed his trip.

You are right. We have done well in establishing links with China through our two universities. They have worked very hard to do that. One thing that we may not have done enough of is to develop tourism. A number of travel agents from the Far East have talked to me about the potential for developing tourism links. The Titanic is very big in China, because of the movie. Have we any solid plan for

developing tourism between China and Northern Ireland? The travel agents also talked about direct flights from Belfast to Beijing. I wonder whether there is any solid plan on that.

Mr M McGuinness: I thank the Member for her question. We told the Chinese people that we are very proud of the fact that we have a woman from China in our Assembly. They were quite surprised at that. It was a real opportunity for us to outline the way in which politics here has moved forward in a progressive way.

Tourism is of huge importance. Of course, the responsibility for marketing tourism resides with Tourism Ireland. You are absolutely right to say that the Titanic brand is absolutely huge in China. Therein lies an opening for us to try to ensure that we get as many people as possible from Asia, and from China itself, to visit here.

There are challenges, as you identified. Those challenges include access and the number of flights. It is absolutely vital that we build connections with all parts of the world, including China. That does represent a real challenge, to which there will be no overnight solution. However, on all our visits there, and this was one of the purposes of going to the Hong Kong Open, we outline for people that we have an incredible tourism project here, not just the Titanic but the Giant's Causeway and the many other things that are happening. The recent find in Fermanagh, for example, is very clearly of interest to an awful lot of people, and, of course, my own city is the City of Culture next year, something that is rapidly catching the imagination of many people. I do not know whether that will reach as far as China, but we will do our best.

Social Investment Fund

2. **Mr Humphrey** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund. (AQO 2992/11-15)

4. **Mr Lunn** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the measurements to be used to ensure that projects funded under the social investment fund are sustainable and meet the overall objectives of the programme. (AQO 2994/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: Junior Minister Jennifer McCann will answer that question.

Ms J McCann (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): With your permission, Mr Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 4 together.

The area planning process for the social investment fund is now well under way, with all zones in the middle of delivering their engagement strategies. Steering groups across the nine social investment zones have been consulting locally with the wider voluntary and community and statutory sectors to identify priorities for inclusion in the draft area plans. Those are due by 31 December 2012. Following submission of the draft plans, consultants will support steering groups during January to review and refine plans across all zones. That will ensure consistency of approach and alignment in common areas of need. We expect final plans to be submitted for appraisal by 31 January next year. The appraisal process will assess the individual projects in the plans against set criteria, such as need, viability, sustainability, value for money and

collaboration. That will help steering groups to prioritise those projects that will achieve maximum impact during the first phase of delivery of the programme. We anticipate that delivery will commence early in the next financial year.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the junior Minister for her answer. What benefits does she believe the social investment fund will have for working-class communities, such as those in my constituency of North Belfast?

Ms J McCann: I believe that the fund will have positive benefits for communities such as the ones that you mention. Although it is to be welcomed that the social investment fund is an additional pot of money, it cannot operate in isolation. It must integrate and add value to other key policies and initiatives. We hope that the social investment fund will not only bring those projects and programmes forward but will lever in other moneys from other areas. There are very clear links to the likes of neighbourhood renewal, anti-poverty measures, education, regeneration and employment programmes, investment and other initiatives. We hope that that will all be very positive news for communities such as your own where there is deprivation and disadvantage.

Mr Speaker: Trevor Lunn is not in his place. His question has been grouped with question 2. I call Chris Lyttle.

2.45 pm

Mr Lyttle: Is the junior Minister confident that the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister will be able to fulfil its statutory obligation to consult with all section 75 groups in the production of the social investment fund area plans in the timescale set?

Ms J McCann: I assure the Member that that will be the case. We are taking that forward at the moment, and we are consulting with a number of groups.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Given the numbers on the steering groups, not all areas across the North have representatives on a steering group. Will the Minister assure us that the areas that are without direct representation will not be excluded from benefiting from the fund?

Ms J McCann: I thank the Member for that question, and I understand the concerns. Other Members have raised those concerns, and I am happy to give him the reassurance he is seeking. Although we have been very mindful of the geographical representation, the reality is that we have to have steering groups of a manageable size in order to work properly. A group of 14 members is certainly manageable, but, unfortunately, that does not mean that every area can be represented, but it does not mean that all areas are not involved in the process. Engagement strategies have been delivered with consultative workshops and clinics held across the breadth of the zones, where possible, to ensure maximum participation.

Mr Durkan: Will the junior Minister let the House know whether the 50:50 split between capital and revenue or resource spend is likely to be retained given the delays in the rolling out of the social investment fund?

Ms J McCann: The spend to date has focused on the consultation work to establish the steering groups and processes for the delivery of the fund, but, although funding was allocated in 2011 and 2012, it was recognised

early on that it would take time to get the necessary approvals, structures and processes in place to ensure that the fund was delivered to the benefit of the communities in need. As a result, this had to be reprofiled into subsequent years of the programme at an early stage. As we have now moved into the area planning stage, funding has been allocated for technical assistance to support the steering groups to develop those plans. Programme spend will be on the delivery of projects approved within the area plans, and we will continue to consider parallel schemes for the delivery of smaller, less strategic interventions that will also have an impact on communities.

Mr Allister: For propositions for spend, be it capital or resource, will the normal procedure of accompanying such an application with an approved business plan be followed under spend under the social investment fund? If not, why not?

Ms J McCann: As I said, it is going to be linked with other interventions that are going to be in place. The intention is that each area plan will consist of about eight to 10 strategic projects directly aligned to the four objectives of the fund. The community will be involved in deciding exactly what those strategic plans are going to be. Some zones will have higher levels of capacity and will not be starting from a blank page, but it is still going to have to go through processes. However, we are still going to be able to get spend out into the communities, and projects, programmes and capital build projects will commence under the time frame that I said earlier.

Maze/Long Kesh: Community Zone

5. **Mrs Hale** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the proposed community zone scoping study on the site adjacent to the Halftown Road, Lisburn, in relation to the Maze/Long Kesh development. (AQO 2995/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The provision of high-quality facilities, which will meet the needs of the local community, is one of the early priorities in the development of the Maze/Long Kesh site and has been included in discussions on the use of the site. In November, the Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation commissioned a scoping study into the possible development of a community zone on approximately 10 acres of the site. The purpose of the study will be to help identify a mix of potential users for a possible new purpose-built community zone, with improved leisure and recreational amenities, which will complement and be adjacent to the existing Halftown Road community facility.

Stakeholder engagement has already begun with local residents, including the Halftown Road residents and the local council, and feedback to date has been very positive. It is anticipated that the scoping study report will be completed by April 2013.

Mrs Hale: I thank the deputy First Minister for his answer. Can he outline the time frame for when he believes the land may become available for community use?

Mr M McGuinness: That is now all very much the domain of the development corporation. As many Members will know, the development corporation is up and running. It is one of the most exciting projects that the Assembly or,

indeed, the Executive will deal with. I believe that it will pursue the development of the site with all haste.

The fact is that the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society (RUAS) is now on site. It has effectively taken 65 acres. It expects to be up and running by early 2013. Developments on the peace-building and conflict resolution centre are now moving forward decisively. Daniel Libeskind, one of the main architects of the new World Trade Center in New York, has visited the site. The First Minister and I are due to meet him shortly.

Therefore, things are beginning to move. In all of that, it is incumbent upon the development corporation to take into account the needs of the local community and ensure that it is not left behind. I believe that we will proceed with all haste and see very positive developments with the Halftown Road community's needs being dealt with effectively. The speed at which things move is, obviously, down to the development corporation. We urge it — as an example of the project moving forward — to deal with that issue as quickly as possible. It is very important to have community buy-in, particularly on a site of that scale. The development corporation will be very conscious of that need.

Ms Boyle: Can the deputy First Minister update the House on progress on developing the Long Kesh site?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, work is progressing well on the regeneration of the site. That is a priority in the Programme for Government. The budget in the current comprehensive spending review (CSR) period for regeneration of the site is £21 million. That substantial investment will primarily be in internal and off-site road infrastructure. Work has commenced on the provision of essential utilities, including developing a mains water and electricity supply for the site. That funding is additional to the €20 million that was secured from Europe for the peace-building and conflict resolution centre.

As many people know, the development corporation board was constituted on 10 September this year. It is tasked to maximise the economic, social and historical potential of the site. The corporation's initial priorities are to ensure the relocation, as I said, of the RUAS to the site in time for the 2013 agricultural show; to have the peace-building and conflict resolution centre up and running by 2015; and to provide essential infrastructure. That initial work will help to create jobs and act as a stimulus to help to generate future investment. Preparations are well advanced for the RUAS with regard to its timescale. Heads of terms have been signed. The contractual development agreement is being finalised for signature by the development corporation and the RUAS. Therefore, the project is moving forward decisively. It can create thousands of new jobs. We are very confident about progress that has been made to date.

Corporation Tax

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on devolving corporation tax powers. (AQO 2996/11-15)

Mr M McGuinness: The joint ministerial working group met for the last time on 18 October. The group's work is complete. A report of its main findings was sent to the Prime Minister for his consideration on 16 November. The British Government must now decide whether the Executive should be offered the opportunity to take

responsibility for the tax. The continued challenges that are faced by the local business community as the economy struggles out of recession mean that it is essential that the Government make their decision as soon as possible.

At our meeting with the Prime Minister during his visit on 20 November 2012, we discussed issues that impact on the local economy, including the general implications of devolving corporation tax. As the Prime Minister needs to consider the matter further, we agreed that we would have a further meeting in London at which we can make our case. We wrote to the Prime Minister on 29 November to ask for that meeting as soon as possible. We hope that the decision can be made quickly in order to allay speculation and unease in the local business community. We have asked for that request to be given urgent consideration.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. Does he have any concern that the referendum on Scottish independence will delay a decision on devolving corporation tax here?

Mr M McGuinness: As I said, we have done everything in our power to make this happen. The final decision obviously rests with the British Prime Minister. I think that we are all very conscious — our Finance Minister referred to this at the weekend — that the situation in Scotland can either be an advantage or a disadvantage to us, and the person who has to decide which way that goes is, obviously, David Cameron. I think it is hugely important that he recognises that we have a special case. Indeed, when David Gauke from the Treasury came to Stormont to meet the First Minister and me, along with our Finance Minister and the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, he clearly acknowledged that the disadvantages that we face, in regard to the border and the 12.5% corporation tax rate in the South, need to be recognised and dealt with.

So, we hope that the decision, when it is made, will be favourable. We are up for the challenge. However, as I said, this is now in the hands of the British Prime Minister in 10 Downing Street; it is up to him to decide, and I hope that he decides in our favour.

Mr Campbell: The deputy First Minister will be aware that we have lost many thousands of jobs down through the years, in no small measure to the murder campaign that is sometimes described as a conflict. How important does he feel the campaign to get corporation tax is in order to try to redress the loss of those many thousands of jobs?

Mr M McGuinness: I am very reluctant to enter into a political debate around that question. We could start the clock 800 years ago or 90 years ago, when Ireland was partitioned. I am not going to deal with that. We will deal with the reality — [Interruption.]

Mr Allister: No justifying it.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr M McGuinness: We will deal with the reality that we are faced with a situation that could clearly be of great advantage to us as we attempt to climb out of recession. The First Minister and I, and, indeed, other Ministers in the Executive, are approaching this in a very positive way, as opposed to the very negative way posed just now in that question.

Mr Cree: Yesterday, the Finance Minister said that the decision on corporation tax was now a political one. Does that mean that there is agreement between Treasury and OFMDFM on the actual cost of such devolution?

Mr M McGuinness: The First Minister and I are members of the ministerial working group that has met Treasury officials on quite a number of occasions. From the very beginning of this project, I have been conscious of the fact that there is considerable opposition in Treasury to devolving the power to set corporation tax to our Administration. At the earliest stages of the process, we witnessed an almost stand-up row in the Cabinet Office between Government Ministers and Treasury.

The Finance Minister is absolutely right. During the course of our discussions with David Cameron in Stormont Castle just a short time ago, we made it clear that we believe it is now over to him. It will be a political decision. This project was driven by Owen Patterson from the very beginning, and we were very interested in having those powers devolved to our Administration. David Cameron saw his own Secretary of State, Owen Patterson, coming here on a white horse, charging forward on the issue of a lower rate of corporation tax in order to help us to rebalance our economy. I do not believe that Owen Patterson did that without the knowledge and support of David Cameron. What we now need to see is those politicians who agreed with us that this is a good idea stepping up to the plate and recognising that it is an essential contributor if we are to be in any way successful in rebalancing our economy and moving forward in a way that we consider is affordable for us.

Social Development

Neighbourhood Renewal: Omagh

1. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister for Social Development whether the neighbourhood renewal action plan and actions within it identified by Omagh neighbourhood renewal partnership will be delivered before 2015. (AQO 3004/11-15)

3.00 pm

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): My Department has and will continue to work closely with the Omagh neighbourhood renewal partnership until 2015 to deliver a range of actions identified by the partnership as priorities within the neighbourhood renewal action plan. Since the launch of the Omagh neighbourhood renewal action plan in 2007, 62 projects have been delivered at a cost to the Department for Social Development (DSD) of £4,656,000. There are 31 actions still to be delivered in the action plan, of which nine projects are at various stages of development.

Mr McElduff: Given the fact that the neighbourhood renewal money needs to be spent by March 2015, is there any prospect of an extension, if required, to allow for actions to be delivered? If we have phase 2, would consideration be given to revising the boundaries? In some cases, current boundaries are not, perhaps, as relevant. They were set down some years ago, but —

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to finish his question.

Mr McElduff: If new priorities exist, might boundaries be revised?

Mr McCausland: The Member makes an interesting point. In some areas, if you look at the areas that were identified as being in the top 10% as regards deprivation, you will see that those same areas, in spite of all the neighbourhood renewal work, are still in the top 10%. That raises a question about the effectiveness of the outworking of neighbourhood renewal in those areas, in that it has not yet made the difference that it should have. In other areas, we find that communities that were previously excluded from the top 10% should now be included. So, questions arise, and those are the sorts of questions that fed into my recent thinking about a review of neighbourhood renewal, looking at the guidance for neighbourhood renewal and what happens beyond 2015, because, in due course, it is intended that that area of work will transfer to local authorities.

Mr Byrne: Will the Minister give consideration to facilitating those areas in the neighbourhood schemes to finance youth-related activities in conjunction with education? Youth services are very often at a loss in those areas.

Mr McCausland: I visited in recent days and months a range of youth centres and facilities funded through neighbourhood renewal. I visited St Malachy's youth club in the Markets area of Belfast the other week, where work is ongoing. I have been at youth projects in mid-Ulster. There are already many examples of support for youth work in terms of programmes being delivered for young people and facilities and buildings. That work is already happening.

G8 Summit: Public Realm Works

2. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the announcement that the Lough Erne Resort, Enniskillen, will host the G8 summit in 2013, what steps he will take to ensure that any investment in public realm works in Enniskillen is fast-tracked to maximise the potential benefits from the summit. (AQO 3005/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has a long track record of working in partnership with Fermanagh — sorry; apologies. Apologies; that is right — it was the connection between Mr Robinson and Fermanagh that threw me there for a minute. Obviously, East Londonderry has expanded.

My Department has a long track record of working in partnership with Fermanagh District Council and others to make improvements to Enniskillen and the neighbourhood renewal areas on the outskirts of the town centre. DSD was the substantial funder of works to create the riverside promenade along Queen Elizabeth Road in the town some years ago and continues to support property owners through the provision of urban development grants to bring empty or derelict commercial buildings back into productive use.

Following my very recent launch of the Enniskillen town centre master plan, which was on the day that the newspapers first reported the G8 story, I signalled my intention to earmark funding for a major public realm improvement scheme in the town centre, with natural stone pavements, public spaces, lighting and street furniture

delivering a real boost to the town centre streetscape for the benefit of local people, traders and visitors alike. That work was due to start in the autumn of 2013. I have asked my officials to accelerate portions of the scheme that can be delivered ahead of the G8 summit. I am also pleased to advise that I have committed £250,000 in the past week to fund a revitalisation programme in the town that will include shopfront dressing and shuttering works, provision of a marquee and pop-up stalls for use in public spaces, and town centre lighting. That work will be completed ahead of the summit.

Mr G Robinson: Given the limited time available, is the Minister confident that any public realm work that is started before the G8 summit will be completed in good time for the summit conference?

Mr McCausland: The Member raises an important point. Clearly, there is no point in commencing any substantial site works in the town centre if there is a prospect that the improvements cannot be completed before the end of May 2013 at the latest. The original schedule for public realm improvements was to commence the scheme towards the end of the summer next year. To accelerate a portion of that programme, perhaps to see the diamond area of the town developed in advance of the summit, will take a lot of work in the coming weeks if it is to be brought forward and started in order to be delivered on time. There will, therefore, be a judgement to be made.

I assure Members that, keen though we are to support the town and the council to showcase all that the town and Fermanagh has to offer, we will be prudent to ensure that we do not end up offering them a building site to negotiate rather than a beautiful town square for visitors to enjoy. We have already provided over £3 million towards the cost of the regeneration of Enniskillen. The additional costs of delivering an extensive public realm scheme is estimated at over £5 million, so DSD would also expect to contribute in the region of £4 million towards the cost of that larger scheme.

Mr Dallat: To sort out the confusion in the mind of the Minister about the location of Mr Robinson, I ask a simple question about Limavady. Is he aware of a serious problem there —

Mr Speaker: Order. I detect that the Member may be going outside the original question. The original question was a very specific question about Enniskillen and the G8.

Welfare Reform Bill

3. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister for Social Development what flexibility he is seeking in his discussions with Ministers in the Department for Work and Pensions in respect of the Welfare Reform Bill. (AQO 3006/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Member will be aware from my statement to the Assembly on 22 October that I have already secured the deferral of the introduction of universal credit in Northern Ireland to April 2014 and flexible payment arrangements when the system goes live. However, from my discussions this week, Lord Freud has advised that he has put on hold any further discussions on flexibilities until after the Ad Hoc Committee finishes its work. The Ad Hoc Committee could cost the Northern Ireland Budget; it has now impacted my discussions with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Ministers on

a range of issues in relation to the Welfare Reform Bill. We are seeking to ensure that jobs that deliver welfare payments are retained in Northern Ireland; that is not the best time to have a fall-out with the coalition Government at Westminster.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. It is a rather inappropriate interference from Lord Freud in the business of the House. Does the Minister feel that flexibility is necessary in the proposed sanction regime or claimant conditionality?

Mr McCausland: I am looking at the moment, although, as I have already indicated, it has been hindered and halted. Whether the Member wants to remain in a state of denial about the truth is another matter. The fact is that it has been put on hold and halted. That was made absolutely clear by Lord Freud to members of the Committee for Social Development and members of the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform during his visit last week. The visit was productive and useful, but it could have been even more productive but for the difficulty that we faced.

Conversations and negotiations with Westminster about this are better done face to face rather than in the open Chamber. That is how to have successful negotiations; that is what worked last time. We were able to get what we wanted, and we can get more in future. That is why, for example, on Friday, while speaking to Advice NI at its AGM, I made particular reference to the issue of the migration of existing customers from disability living allowance (DLA) to personal independence payments (PIP). I wanted to flag up the areas that we are thinking about. The way to conduct those negotiations is face to face.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Minister for his work thus far in getting flexibilities. He is aware of the concern on all sides of the House regarding the implications of the Welfare Reform Bill. I know that he has done it before, but could he again spell out the implications of delay? Those who exercised their democratic mandate in setting up an Ad Hoc Committee have done so. Will he detail the cost of that, and the further cost if the Ad Hoc Committee takes an inordinate time to conclude its business?

Mr McCausland: I welcome the Member's question. First, there is the financial cost. The estimated cost to the Northern Ireland block from potential delays in the Welfare Reform Bill not securing Royal Assent and the associated regulations not being passed in time is £18 million. That is based on a three-month delay to the current timetable and represents an estimate of the annually managed expenditure controls that will not be achieved and the funding that may have to be found by the Northern Ireland Executive for the discretionary elements of the social fund. That sets out clearly the basis on which that figure was obtained — it is not just a figure that someone conjured out of the air. I have stated clearly the two elements that make up the figure of £18 million.

I mentioned a three-month delay. I remember a discussion that I had with a Member from the other side of the Chamber, who told me that the work of the Ad Hoc Committee could be done in three days, yet it has a timetable of six weeks. We will see whether it completes its work at the end of six weeks. It certainly was not done in three days; in fact, the Committee was not even set up in three days.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister will be aware of the anxiety in the community about the Welfare Reform Bill. Will the Minister advise us whether he will allocate additional funding to the advice sector for the extra workload that will be put on it? I am thinking particularly of our citizens advice bureaux throughout Northern Ireland that will have to answer questions from all our constituents.

Mr McCausland: The Member has spoken about people's questions and concerns. At the end of Lord Freud's visit, we met the Victims' Commissioner and two victims of the Troubles. One had had both legs blown off in a terrorist explosion in the early 1970s and the other had lost a leg and the other leg had been severely damaged in a terrorist explosion in 1991. Both those individuals were obviously deeply traumatised by their experiences of violence and the injuries that they had suffered. They were also deeply concerned that, through some change from DLA to PIP, they would lose the opportunity for mobility or a vehicle or would lose their DLA payments. They were virtually on the edge of tears when they thought of the impact that that would have. That is their only lifeline to the outside world.

It occurs to me that there are two issues. The first is that everyone should be very cautious in their predictions of what may or may not happen. Lord Freud assured those two individuals that they would not be affected. He has written to people with similar disabilities in GB to reassure them, and I intend to do the same in Northern Ireland. Those who will not be affected fear very much that they will be affected, and it is almost cruel that folk like that are being misled. So, there is one extreme of saying this or that will happen when it might not happen. On the other hand, there is the danger of offering unfounded hopes for concessions that may not be achievable. We need to be very careful and cautious in what we say.

We will look very carefully at the impact on people and the need for advice and so on. However, at this point, it is not exactly clear what shape the changes will take in Northern Ireland. We have seen some flexibilities, and I think that there may be other concessions. Therefore, I am hopeful that the impact may not be great and that we may be able to mitigate the worst excesses of welfare reform.

3.15 pm

Personal Independence Payments

4. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister for Social Development what steps are being taken to ensure that the mistakes in the Atos assessments are not being repeated with the new system for the future personal independence payment assessments. (AQO 3007/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The performance of Atos in relation to the work capability assessment is subject to robust monitoring arrangements that have resulted in considerable progress towards meeting service levels and targets. The personal independence payment assessment process will be different to the work capability assessment as it will focus on the ability to carry out key everyday activities, such as preparing and cooking food, the everyday challenges that people face and the support they need, rather than the functions linked to a person's ability to work, as in the work capability assessment. As such, the information gathered and the approach taken in the assessments will be different. Moreover, the work

capability assessment looks at an individual's ability to work, whereas personal independence payment will be payable to disabled people, regardless of whether they are or are not in work. That fact alone further underlines the differing nature of the assessments.

My Department will ensure that the recommendations of the independent reviews of the work capability assessment carried out by Professor Malcolm Harrington on relevant recommendations are taken into account in developing the personal independence payment claim and assessment process.

The personal independence payment assessments will also be carried out by Capita Business Services, a different provider than that providing the work capability assessment. The personal independence payment assessment criteria have also been the subject of extensive public consultation in Northern Ireland — at the same time as in Great Britain — from May 2011, with the most recent issued in January this year. Following the closure of the latest consultation exercises, I wrote to the Work and Pensions Department's Minister for Disabled People, Esther McVey MP, and secured a commitment that all views and concerns expressed by people and organisations in Northern Ireland will be carefully considered as they evaluate what further changes need to be made to assessment criteria to ensure that they fairly reflect disabled people's needs.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Will medical evidence have primacy in any final decision?

Mr McCausland: I set out in my answer the nature of the assessment. There is still work to be done on that. *[Interruption.]* I will repeat, so that people who were maybe talking there — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McCausland: I think that it is difficult for some people to keep up because they are so busy talking to others at the same time that they do not really listen.

I set out in my answer very clearly the nature of the assessment for the migration to PIP. I also contrasted it with the work capability assessment (WCA) for employment and support allowance, and it is clear that everything that is decided must be evidence based. The point is that it should be based on firm and accurate evidence of which that will, undoubtedly, be a part.

Ms Brown: What assurances can the Minister provide that accessibility issues will not arise with the personal independence payment assessment service provider?

Mr McCausland: The Member raises an important point. I assure her that the documentation that was issued as part of the procurement exercise to obtain a suitable assessment provider stipulated that providers must ensure that accommodation is in a suitable ground floor area in all locations, to enable all customers to be dealt with in an environment suitable to their needs. Capita has confirmed that the assessments will be delivered through home visits and a network of accessible consultation centres across Northern Ireland, and that it will not use any premises that are used for work capability assessment. Capita consulted extensively with representative groups to design a fair and claimant-centred assessment service, and it is committed to ongoing dialogue to ensure continuing development during implementation and throughout delivery.

Mr Beggs: Did the Minister's Department undertake any research to determine differences in the profile of likely recipients of PIP assessment and support in Northern Ireland and those in the rest of the United Kingdom and whether it will be necessary to make any adjustments?

Mr McCausland: I emphasise a point that I made already and that is fundamental to this. If we are to argue our case on those matters with Westminster, we need firm, accurate and up-to-date evidence — not something from 18 months or two years ago. We recently got up-to-date information on the housing sector and the housing stock so that we can compare Northern Ireland with other regions of the United Kingdom.

Yes, there are clearly differences between DLA and PIP. Over 110,000 people in Northern Ireland are recipients of DLA. In comparison with regions of Great Britain, that percentage is up at the high end. In some areas in Northern Ireland, the figure is proportionately higher. There are concentrations of DLA uptake where there is a higher number of claimants than in other areas in Northern Ireland, so there are differences.

I mentioned the impact of the Troubles on people who have been physically disabled. There are also many people who may not have had the same level of physical disability but whose mental health has been affected and who have been traumatised by terrorist activity. So, there are differences. That is why I said to Advice NI at its AGM on Friday that I was tasking officials here in Northern Ireland with looking at those differences in more detail to see what their impact would be so that we can present a strong case to Westminster.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his previous answers. If, in the determination of PIPs, the central and determinant factor is not medical, what would the alternative be?

Mr McCausland: The key point is as I set out, and I will simply repeat what I said. The personal independence assessment payment process will be different, as it will focus on the ability to carry out key everyday activities, such as preparing and cooking food, the everyday challenges that people face and the support that they need, rather than on the functions that are linked to a person's ability to work, as in the case of WCA. Those are the key areas, and information and evidence on those will be vital.

Welfare Reform: Underoccupancy

5. **Mr McAleer** asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the concerns expressed by the Housing Executive to the Committee for Social Development about the provisions of the Welfare Reform Bill in respect of underoccupancy which, if unchanged, may lead to it facing challenges in meeting the new requirements and could result in evictions and tenants being declared homeless. (AQO 3008/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I recognise that the underoccupancy restriction is a serious issue for Northern Ireland and that concern has been expressed about its possible impact.

I am very conscious that we have a different housing market here, and, although I am satisfied that the numbers that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive provided are approximately correct, my focus now is on identifying

solutions. I recently had a very productive meeting with Lord Freud, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, and we will continue to work together to identify any possible solutions. However, as I said, the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee will prohibit further discussion about the legislative proposals.

In the meantime, my officials are working with the Housing Executive to develop a range of support measures to complement those outlined in my housing strategy, which aim to mitigate underoccupancy for those affected, support households through the transition and ensure that everyone has access to affordable housing. Those measures include increased funding for discretionary housing payments.

Mr McAleer: The Minister will be aware that as many as 32,000 households will be affected by underoccupancy. In the light of the concerns that the Housing Executive raised, will the Minister tell us how many units will be developed in the next three years to cope with that demand?

Mr McCausland: The Member raised a good point. First, the scale of the impact in Northern Ireland in percentage terms is similar to that in Wales and in a number of regions in England. For example, in the north-west of England the figure is virtually the same in percentage terms as it is in Northern Ireland and Wales, and the figure in the north-east of England is actually higher. So, the first thing to bear in mind is that we are not that different from the rest of the United Kingdom in the impact that it has on numbers. Those figures are very clear. We have that information, and we have the comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom.

The second thing, then, is how we ensure that we address that. The fact is that, when the social housing development programme was put on my desk in March 2012, I asked the Housing Executive whether it had made provision for and taken account of welfare reform, and the answer was no.

That was unacceptable, and it was why the Housing Executive was sent back to rework the social housing development programme. That is why I had the conversation with the Housing Executive and why I was particularly encouraged that its new chair gets it. He understands it, as does the new vice-chair, and the organisation has a better approach now under its new leadership. They have a lot of experience of such issues across the water in Great Britain. They have decades of experience in the field of housing, so we are in a better position.

A number of ideas were put during that conversation around how we can do that. It is a challenge. We need a little bit more time to discuss discretionary housing payments and why they have quadrupled between 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 from £1.7 million to £6.9 million. There is more money for discretionary housing payments to enable people to avoid a position in which they would be unable to stay in their home. We need to work on that in the meantime, because there are good ideas and good models of good practice about how appropriate housing can be delivered, particularly of smaller-sized units.

Mrs Dobson: Given that over 32,000 households will be affected by the underoccupancy levy on housing benefit, will the Minister confirm what assistance he will offer those citizens who occupy lawfully allocated properties

now adjudicated as being underoccupied and who wish to move but are prevented from doing so by the lack of suitable properties?

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive approaches that by looking at how it can match people with appropriate housing. It is almost like a dating agency.

There are other issues for people who are in a property that is much too big for their needs. I know of examples of single persons being in a three-bedroom house with no children calling regularly. They are in single-person accommodation with three bedrooms, and they are heating more rooms than they need to heat. There is an issue there about fuel costs at a time when they are particularly high. That matching-up of people to accommodation is crucial.

However, to get the flexibility that we need, and movement in the housing sector, we need to have more accommodation of the right size. That is why we have had the conversation with the Housing Executive and the housing associations. As I already indicated, we have quadrupled the discretionary housing payment so that there is an opportunity to do that.

The challenge is out there and was given to the housing associations individually at an earlier meeting. We are starting to get responses back from them as to what they may be able to do.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. What action does his Department intend to take to support those who suffer with severe mental illness who are unable to live in shared accommodation when they are hit by this underoccupancy penalty?

Mr McCausland: That issue is not unique to Northern Ireland; it happens across the United Kingdom. It was interesting to hear from David Freud when he was over that there is now some evidence of how different people are responding to that challenge in GB. Some people simply say that they want to stay where they are and if their housing benefit does not meet the full cost, they will meet the extra £9 themselves. Some people decide to move. The responses differ.

That is the situation in GB. We do not know how it will work out in Northern Ireland. However, I assure the Member that account will be taken of the cases of people who are in particularly difficult circumstances, whether physical or mental. We have an opportunity with the discretionary housing payment to reflect on what the best outcome might be for those people. I agree with the Member entirely that we need to be very sensitive, particularly to people who have special needs such as those mentioned.

Adjourned at 3.30 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 December 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Ministerial Statements

Early Years: Learning to Learn

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Le do chead, a Cheann Comhairle, ba mhaith liom ráiteas a dhéanamh faoi na chéad chéimeanna eile i dtaca le hoideachas agus foghlaim do na luathbhlianta. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the next steps for early years education and learning.

In July, I came to the Assembly to set out a clear way forward for early years. I explained at that time that the child and their needs must be the central focus of my revised proposals. I outlined my intention to proceed with a two-strand approach. The first strand would be the development of revised proposals with a clear focus on early education and learning. The second strand would involve engagement with ministerial colleagues to explore the potential for enhanced co-operation around early intervention, including early years, under the Delivering Social Change framework.

Strand one is now complete, and I am in a position to launch a new framework for early years education and learning entitled Learning to Learn, which, for the first time, sets out a clear way forward for all early years education and learning services. In developing this framework, I have carefully considered the views of a range of interest groups and concluded that the approach that I am announcing today provides a solid basis on which to move forward. I have also considered lessons learned elsewhere in early years education and have spoken with colleagues from other jurisdictions at a recent meeting of the British-Irish Council to hear the experiences of other Administrations across these islands.

Since the early years 0-6 strategy was launched in 2010, aspects of early years policy such as child-minding and day care have been realigned between my Department and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety. The starting position for reviewing the strategy is, therefore, very different. Learning to Learn will be a key building block in a suite of important education policies aimed at helping children achieve their full potential through a determined focus on raising standards and narrowing the performance gap. It aims to strengthen existing policies and programmes delivering early years education and learning services to children and families.

Since 2010, when the draft strategy was launched for consultation, my Department's investment in preschool services has increased from £73 million to £84 million. If

the foundation stage is included, that figure increases to over £200 million per annum. I have made additional funds available to ensure that the availability of preschool places for 2013-14 is in line with the Programme for Government commitment to make a preschool place available for every child whose parents wish it. I have also amended the legislation on admissions arrangements for preschool to remove the priority criteria for children with a July/August birthday.

Between 2006-07 and 2011-12, the number of children in funded preschool provision increased by over 2,000. Sure Start funding has more than doubled, from £9.3 million in 2006 to £23.4 million in 2012-13, and the Sure Start developmental programme for two- to three-year-olds, which was first introduced in 2007, will be delivered to over 1,600 children in their penultimate preschool year in 2012-13. That investment and focus on protecting early years budgets demonstrates my commitment to providing a range of early education and learning services for children. I am bringing forward proposals to ensure that the early years education and learning services we have are of a high quality, are child-focused and contribute to children achieving their potential.

The goals of raising standards for all and closing the performance gap underpin the Learning to Learn framework. They are just as relevant to education services for our youngest children as they are to older learners; in fact, maybe more so. For children in the preschool programme, their education experience lasts for 38 weeks, and the foundation stage lasts for a further two years. Delivering anything less than the highest quality of early years educational experience short-changes those children. We know that some children come to preschool and some start school already lagging behind their peers cognitively, emotionally and socially. If we do not address that in the early years, those disadvantages will accumulate, and they can impact on a child's life chances.

The overall policy aim of the Learning to Learn framework is, therefore, that all children should have opportunities to achieve their potential through high-quality early learning and education experiences. The framework is underpinned by a set of early education and learning principles that make the needs of children the key focus of provision and will shape how we plan and deliver early years education and learning services now and in the future. Those principles are that education and learning begins at birth; children and their families are entitled to high-quality and age-appropriate early years education and learning services and opportunities; the rights of children and their families should be respected; equality and inclusion are

essential characteristics of quality, early years education and learning; and collaboration between key sectors and bodies will play an important part in securing improved outcomes for young children in their early years.

Sonraíonn an creat roinnt mhaith gníomhartha sainiúla le foráil oideachais do pháistí sna luathbhlianta a fheabhsú agus a neartú. The framework details specific actions to strengthen and enhance provision for children in their early years. I will highlight, briefly, some of the key actions.

The preschool education programme should be focused on children in the preschool year only. That has been a long-standing issue, and I intend to legislate as soon as possible to define the age range for the preschool education programme. Only children in their immediate preschool year will be eligible. However, I will retain a power to enable two-year-olds to access services in schools and nursery schools outside the programme. I will legislate to prevent schools establishing new or maintaining existing reception classes.

Sure Start represents a major investment for my Department. I intend to commission a review of the Sure Start programme to examine the extent to which the investment helps to secure well-being and developmental outcomes for children and families. That will include potential options for the expansion of a two-year-old programme and a consideration of how access to services is determined.

Early years education is an important stage of education in its own right as well being essential in helping to prepare children for the transition to primary school and continuous learning. I therefore plan to extend the foundation stage curriculum to include a non-compulsory preschool year and two compulsory primary school years. That will be supported by the development of guidance and information for parents and practitioners on managing those transitions.

The thorough inspection process already in place will continue and be extended, with the principles of Every School a Good School being applied to all DE-funded early years provision. Children who may face barriers to learning because of disadvantage require particular support. I want to refocus the use of extended schools funding on nursery schools and nursery units to help to identify and address underdeveloped social, language and communication skills. I also plan to make available additional resources to voluntary and private settings in the preschool programme that meet similar criteria for extended schools funding.

In the area of quality, I am keen to draw on the existing expertise and experience in the sector. I plan to pilot early years education support clusters to help to raise standards by making greater use of the teaching expertise in nursery schools and units along with expertise in playgroups across other relevant providers and early years specialists. Additional funding will be made available to support these pilots. The role of the workforce is of fundamental importance. In my November statement, Putting Pupils First, I highlighted the importance of effective leadership and high-quality teaching. I, therefore, plan to introduce a programme of continuous professional development for preschool providers with a focus on leadership and management.

There has been a recurring issue around enrolment in nursery schools and nursery units and staff ratios. I

intend to introduce some flexibility in overall enrolment numbers up to a maximum class size of 30 in certain circumstances. I will also engage directly with nursery teachers and principals on the development of pilots to test the optimum staff:pupil ratio for nursery schools and units. In the longer term, the Department will also consider options for standardised patterns of preschool attendance as part of a wider approach to area-based planning. Until this work is complete, I do not plan to approve any new full-time provision. Following evaluation, I will consider the extension of the current pilots initiated by the review of special educational needs and inclusion. This will help to improve access to specialist support and build capacity for staff to enable them to identify and meet the special and additional educational needs of children across preschool settings. I will also seek to identify further opportunities for joint working with other Departments to improve the co-ordination of services to families.

The key role of all parents or guardians as their child's primary educator cannot be overemphasised. Indeed, I recently launched the campaign Get Involved Because Education Works to try to engage and encourage parents from all walks of life to become more involved in their child's education. I will continue to develop that initiative and will engage directly with the Health Department and other Departments under the Delivering Social Change framework led by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) to support parents and help them to understand the value of education and improve the home learning environment.

The changes that I have outlined will have a significant impact on the way we manage and implement our services. Some proposals may involve a reallocation of early years funding outside the schools budget; others will require additional investment. I have already made additional funding available to early years, and I am prepared to make further funding available. In taking forward these actions, I will review existing early years budgets with a view to redistributing funding from budgets that are no longer consistent with the framework and our aims and objectives. The framework contains specific actions. When they are implemented, we will build effectively on existing good practice and enable significant further progress to be made in improving early years education provision. This will also increase the capacity for improvement and facilitate genuine engagement with parents. The statutory sector, the voluntary and community sector and the private sector all have considerable expertise and a shared commitment to and passion for early years services. Moving forward, I hope that all those sectors will be able to work together productively to deliver improvements for children and families. Although I welcome the debate on early years services, the context has changed, with aspects of early years policy going back to DHSSPS and the emergence of the Delivering Social Change framework. The time has now come for positive action. I want all children and their families to benefit from quality services, and, today, I have set out how we can achieve this.

I know that there will be considerable interest in the Learning to Learn framework, and I, therefore, announce a further focused consultation that will end on 31 January 2013. This will provide an opportunity for key stakeholders and interested parties to consider whether the proposed actions require further refinement. I am not ignoring calls

for an integrated approach to early childhood education and care for this Administration, but I am not reopening the debate about the policy aim, objectives and outcomes of the framework. We cannot hope to raise standards and narrow the gaps in performance if we remain locked in debates about strategies and take no action. The time has come to set out what I plan to do to improve the early years education and learning experiences for children.

The publication of the Learning to Learn framework represents a new and important chapter in the development of early years education. For the first time, the Department of Education's overall policy for early years education and learning is set out clearly, as are the actions that I propose to take to strengthen and develop early years services. I have already taken important steps to develop this area, and I want to see further action. Action is the key. Children have a very short period to benefit from early years education. I want every child to have the best early years experience that we can deliver, and I want families to be genuinely engaged in their child's learning and development. We should think in terms not of the child being ready for school but of our services being ready for the child.

10.45 am

Mr Storey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Education): I thank the Minister for his statement.

The early years strategy has been in development for some time. Indeed, the previous Education Minister came to the House in 2006 and said that it was anticipated that the Department would be in a position to publicly consult on a draft strategy by February 2008. Here we are now almost in 2013. Progress in the Department is certainly swift and decisive.

The House needs to be aware of the feedback that was given to that consultation, when it eventually went out. Some 2,000 responses were received, of which 1,200 were described as providing a detailed narrative. However, the Department confirmed to the Education Committee that 90% of those respondents did not agree with the aim, visions and actions under the four objectives in the strategy. Therefore, I am glad that the Minister has come to the House today and set out a number of issues, including the review of Sure Start and the provision of nursery places for schools and of more resources for voluntary and private preschool settings that meet the extended schools criteria. However, it raises a raft of questions that, no doubt, we will come to over the next number of weeks.

I want to take the Minister to one point that he made in his statement. He mentioned the:

"reallocation of early years funding allocated outside of the schools' budget".

Will the Minister clarify whether that will mean an actual reduction in primary school budgets, and will he ensure that the funds in our primary schools, which are already being stretched, are not depleted further or decimated?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for his comments, and I welcome the opportunity to clarify that point. If the House got that view from the statement, I want to correct it. It certainly is not a reallocation of funds away from primary schools or post-primary. We are referring to the funding for nursery schools etc under the aggregated schools budget,

which is not affected by the framework that I announced in my statement. I am looking at other areas of early years funding, and I am reviewing them to ensure that they fit in with the context of my framework today. All schools have been notified of their annual budget over the next couple of years, and today's statement will not affect that. It refers to other areas of funding for early years, which I will be reviewing. They may well fit into the framework that I announced today, but, if they do not, that funding will have to be realigned elsewhere.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement, and I agree with him that it represents a vital and important development in early years education. Bearing in mind that the Minister referred to the fact that the framework that he announced is consistent with best practice elsewhere, can he outline the importance of learning from what is happening elsewhere and, indeed, of sharing our best practice with others?

Mr O'Dowd: I thank the Member for the question. I think it is vital that we learn from experience from across these islands and, indeed, internationally. Last weekend saw the meeting of the British-Irish Council, where Administrations from across these islands came together in Wales to discuss early years education. I found that very valuable, not only the meeting but the engagement with Ministers and their officials from elsewhere during the couple of days that we spent in Wales. I want to learn from other jurisdictions, and I want other jurisdictions to learn from us.

The Chair of the Committee rightly points out that we have been working on an early years strategy for the past number of years, but I will also point out that, during that time, things have not stood still. We have expanded our preschool services, and 23,000 to 24,000 children now benefit from preschool education. The Programme for Government makes it explicit that we now have to provide every child who wishes it with a preschool place. That will require further investment, and I made investment available this year. We also want to look at early years provision across the Executive. The Delivering Social Change framework allows us to do that. My officials and I are engaging with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, and I know that other Ministers, in particular the Health Minister, are keen to get early years provision right.

I listened to the presentations from the various Administrations — Guernsey, Jersey, the Isle of Man, the South, England, Wales and so on — on how they deliver their early years services. In some aspects, we are more advanced than they are, but, in others, we should learn from them. I am particularly interested to learn about the programme for two-year-olds that is being rolled out in England. There are elements of that that I would like to see transferred across to our jurisdiction. That will require funding. I also see an opportunity in the review of the Sure Start programme for us to learn from the two-year-old programme and perhaps match it with something similar here.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome a great deal of what is in it, particularly on working with the rest of the UK, early education and learning and including parents.

I have a concern that, driven probably quite rightly by budgets, we will eventually end up with too much regulation and guidelines being forced on everyone. Will the Minister respect the need for parental choice and flexibility and not go into too much regulation?

Mr O'Dowd: The only area of regulation in which I am really interested is ensuring that all providers, whether they be statutory, private or voluntary, are providing a high-class education service to the young people in their care. It is evident from all the research that we examined that the early years are fundamental to improving a child's educational outcomes. The most recent chief inspector's report has stated that we are making good progress on ensuring that all settings provide good education, but I want to ensure that that continues. Although I have not today set out any legislative changes relating to the inspection process, I am of the view that any setting that is open to inspection by the inspectorate should be responsible for the outcome of the report and for ensuring that, if there is a need for improvement, improvements are made. If support is required, it should be offered. However, if we get to the stage at which a voluntary or private sector provider is not improving, it should be removed from the preschool education advisory group (PEAG). As I said in my statement, it has 36 weeks with a young person in its care to provide early years education, and that should be right and proper.

I want to work and co-operate with all providers and parents out there. It currently is the case that parents put down their preference. It is not a choice but a parental preference, and we try to facilitate that as best we can. We cannot always match identically demand to provision, but we are getting better at it all the time.

Mr Rogers: I welcome the Minister's statement. I, like others, have had opportunities to witness the Sure Start and Barnardo's programmes, which are enhancing the key role of parents and giving our children the right start. What practical steps are being taken to ensure that such programmes are rolled out to a wider audience?

Mr O'Dowd: In April, I think, I announced the expansion of the Sure Start services to the top 25% most deprived wards. They are in the top 20% at the moment. Now is an optimum time to reassure ourselves that the almost £24 million that we spend annually on Sure Start is spent in the most effective and efficient way possible to deliver the services required. The principles of Sure Start are sound: early intervention and working with families and children. The two-year-old programme also provides important and essential work in communities. However, now that the programme is there and receiving a substantial amount of public money, it is a good time to reassure ourselves, through a review, that the money is being spent in the right areas and that the right people, families and communities are receiving the support that Sure Start provides.

Mr Lunn: I also warmly welcome the Minister's statement, which is very well summed up by its last line.

I want to ask about the suggestion of co-operation in nursery provision between the various sectors. The Minister plans to pilot early years education support clusters. Does that mean that he will make an attempt to standardise the qualification levels for teachers across those sectors? Has he any plans to introduce some flexibility to the school starting age?

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to introduce flexibility to the school starting age at this time. I am of the view that that would require its own consultation and significant work by the Department, ESA and the boards. It covers so many areas, from the structures of our education system to parents and childcare. All those matters would have to be brought in. Therefore, it would be a piece of work on its own. The foundation stage has slightly changed the question around that. At one stage, there was a concern that we started our children at school far too young and that the education provided was not appropriate. I think that the foundation stage has reassured people that more age-appropriate education takes place in those first two years. However, I have no doubt that we will return to that question at some stage.

On your other point, the clusters are being brought together to share expertise between the statutory and non-statutory sectors. There may be one or other of the lead organisations involved; there may be a statutory body in one area and a non-statutory one in another. However, the key is that those groups are brought together and learn from each other's best experience. It is fair to say, from my experience in the Education Committee, that, at times, the relationship between the two sectors was frosty. I think that has improved, and I think that there is better work and communications between them. I believe that the idea for the clusters came from the groups themselves, and it is a good idea.

At this stage, I am not proposing to standardise qualifications in the sense that it all must be teacher-led, but I want to ensure that there is continuous professional development among teaching staff and non-teaching staff in non-statutory sectors. I also want to ensure that the qualifications that are currently available and required are the most robust and satisfactory. We also have to give space and time to those working in the sectors to achieve further and higher qualifications, so there is a supporting role for the Department as well.

Mr Craig: I welcome the Minister's statement. I note that we are talking about the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors working together to deliver improvement for our children. What role will the inspectorate have in ensuring high-quality delivery for our children and consistency across all sectors in that delivery? For that matter, Minister, what enforcement power does the inspectorate really have across sectors, specifically the private sector?

Mr O'Dowd: The inspectorate, by right, can inspect all settings, regardless of their status. The Every School a Good School policy relates to schools and nursery units specifically, where formal intervention programmes, etc, can be put in place. In the voluntary, community and private sectors, there are inspections, and a report can be produced and recommendations made for improvement. What if improvement does not take place? There is a duty on anyone receiving money from the Department of Education for education provision who is inspected to take cognisance and due regard of the report and to make improvements. Ultimately, if improvements are not made, they can be removed from the PEAG programme. That is the ultimate sanction. I would not want to reach that point but, if it has to be reached, we will reach it. My statement shows that early years is now an integral part of our education system; it is as integral as primary and post-

primary. It is now early years, primary and post-primary, and I expect all the providers in those sectors to provide a first-class age-appropriate education to the young people they serve. There is an inspection regime and a sanctions regime for all. I will take a look at the contracts that will be signed by voluntary, community and private providers to make sure that the clause on inspection is robust enough, and, if I am of the view that it is not, I will certainly strengthen it.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's announcement to the House on introducing a programme of continuous professional development for preschool providers. As preschool provision is a short period of any child's life, will the Minister expand on the importance of effective leadership and high-quality teaching in those early years settings?

11.00 am

Mr O'Dowd: Time and time again, across our education sectors, we have found, through local and international research, that leadership is the key to good education. The leadership of the principal and of the teacher in the classroom and, in the community and voluntary settings, the leadership of the classroom personnel are vital. It is the personnel in the classroom who are the key to improving our educational outcomes.

The cluster groups, which I spoke about with Mr Lunn, are key to continual professional development for all staff in our early years settings, and they will be key to delivering continuing professional development. I am also looking at how we can assist community and voluntary groups to provide further support, learning and training days for their staff. I will continue to examine how we can improve that further.

One of the key aspects on the way forward is the cluster groups: the sectors learning from each other; best practice being shared; and communication with each other on how we best deliver early years education to our young people.

Mrs Hale: I thank the Minister for his statement this morning. I note that he plans to put a freeze on full-time preschool provision until a standardised pattern of attendance is considered. Given extended timescales for area planning, can the Minister give some indication of the timescale for ending the freeze on new full-time preschool places?

Mr O'Dowd: The research we are dealing with dates back to 2006, and that research indicated then that there was no cognitive difference in a child's development between full-time and part-time provision. In legislation, full-time provision is four and a half hours; part-time is two and a half hours. There is a range in between those. Recently, because of budgetary constraints, I have been approving only part-time provision, but this question has always remained: what is best for the child's development? Do we need full-time provision? Do we need to extend or, maybe, change the legislation to define what full-time provision is? I want to conduct further research on that matter. That may take time; it may take upwards of a year to complete that research. That will not be affected by area planning, because, at this stage, I have not conducted area planning in relation to nursery provision. It will be affected by the time that it takes me to commission research and for that research to be delivered back to the Department.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the fact that his strategy is now finally in place. The Minister has said that he hopes that the statutory, voluntary, community and private sectors will work together in the future. I am sure he will agree that that is key to the delivery of quality early years provision for children and their families. How soon does the Minister think that will be achieved? What specific steps is his Department taking to ensure that it is?

Mr O'Dowd: The relationship between the community, voluntary and statutory sectors has improved over the past number of years through collaboration and a better understanding of each other. It will take a bit of time to put the cluster groups in place. I would like to see it being months, rather than years; in fact, I would like to see something in place by the start of the 2013 school term, if not sooner. However, it depends on how quickly we can get them together. I am not looking to delay them any further than that. I am setting funding aside to assist them with pilot programmes, and there will be pilot programmes across the North, in both rural and urban areas. We will learn from those pilot programmes over, probably, two years, and then we will implement the best practice for them across the sectors. It is a good way forward. These people work at the coal face every day of the week; they know the best practice; they know the expertise; and they know what works in the classroom. I want them to learn from each other. It will be a way for them to develop a better relationship than in the past.

Mr McMullan: I congratulate the Minister on his statement this morning. Will the Minister reiterate the significance of early years education and why it is so vital that we get it right? Go raibh maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, all local and international research tells us that intervention at an early stage of a child's life is one of the key elements to ensuring that that child's educational and social development is improved. We are seeing the benefits of it. The investment that we have made in early years over the past decade is now beginning to show results in our primary schools and, in the future, will show results in our post-primary schools. We do not always get it right, but we are improving dramatically from where we were even five years ago. Early years is key to success. Today, I have set out early learning in the context of education; we will work in partnership with Executive colleagues. Delivering Social Change, which now operates under the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, will bring significant change in the level of co-operation between Departments and the levels of service being delivered to families to ensure that the early formative years of a child's life are improved and children are given the life chances to be everything that they want to be or can be in future years.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Ba mhaith liom a fhiafraí den Aire conas a chinnteoidh na moltaí a nocht sé anseo inniu go mbeidh áiteanna réamhscolaíochta ar fáil sna áiteanna a bhfuil siad de dhíth. I thank the Minister for his statement. How will the initiatives that he revealed today ensure that preschool places are available where they are needed?

Mr O'Dowd: Is bualadh leat an cheist. I thank the Member for the question. Today's announcement will not make school places available where they are needed.

I conducted a review in 2011 to achieve that. It will be a rolling programme of work over a number of years. I am aware that the Member sponsored a debate in the Chamber a few months ago on Middletown. We are getting it right 95% of the time, but we need to get it right 100% of the time. We continue to work on matching demand with services. I have made more funding available to the education boards to provide early years places at statutory, community and voluntary and private level. A rolling programme of work will assess what services are available, assess what services we need to deliver and, most important for me as Minister, ensure that they are in the right place. There is no point in bringing development proposals to me to provide additional nursery places in areas in which they are not required, which has been the case on a number of occasions. I want to see nursery places in community and voluntary settings in the areas where they are required. We are getting better at it and are improving all the time. We have not got it right yet, but I expect an improvement this year as well.

Miss M McIlveen: I welcome the fact that there will be a consultation period on the framework, although I would have preferred a 12-week period, given that we are running into Christmas. It would be useful if the Minister could maybe consider that. How does the framework link to the childcare strategy, specifically in relation to the research that is being undertaken to make better use of the schools estate to support childcare access and affordability?

Mr O'Dowd: I am willing to work with the childcare strategy. I am also working with Delivering Social Change. Indeed, tomorrow morning, there is a subcommittee meeting of the Executive on childcare provision that I will also be attending. I am open to discussions and flexibility. The framework that I have set out today is about early learning. It does not rule out the involvement of other strategies or using the schools estate for childcare. However, I emphasise that the early years programme is about children's development; it is not a childcare service. The consequence is that childcare is provided, but we do not send our children to primary school for childcare purposes; we send them there for personal development and education. It is the same for early years. I am trying to get the message across to parents and communities that this is about education. However, I am up for involvement in a childcare strategy. The framework does not rule that out. It will fit quite neatly into a childcare strategy, and my Department will play its role in developing that strategy.

Mr Byrne: Like others, I welcome the Minister's statement and recognise the improvements that have been made in preschool provision. In relation to the second strand, what co-operation is the Minister seeking with ministerial colleagues about improving preschool provision? Does he recognise the fact that Montessori schooling is proving quite beneficial in some areas?

Mr O'Dowd: I seek the co-operation of ministerial colleagues, as they seek my co-operation. It is now recognised by all Departments and the Executive that early intervention is key. I am acutely aware of the work of the Health Minister, and I will meet him later today to discuss further how we can co-operate with each other on early interventions from birth right through to the start of formal education.

Today, I set out a framework that encapsulates early learning. It allows for all our communities, rural and urban,

to be provided with an early learning setting that will assist their children to be ready to move on to the next stage of education, which is primary school education. Therefore, if a setting fits into that framework, I support it; if it does not, questions will have to be asked about why it is continuing. It would have to prove its benefit to early years education. The framework sets out the Department's role. If others working separately to that wish to seek public funding, they will have to prove their worth.

Mr Dallat: I also thank the Minister for his statement. In it, he says that he cannot overemphasise the need for parents to be involved in the education of their children. I am sure that everyone in the Chamber totally agrees with that, particularly if the parents were let down by the system themselves. How does the Minister propose to mark his own homework, so to speak, and evaluate the progress made in his Department and with others to ensure that we break the cycle of illiteracy and innumeracy that has plagued us for far too long?

Mr O'Dowd: We are breaking it. All the reports coming forward show that the education system is improving. It is not improving as fast as any of us would like, but there are clear step changes in educational outcomes for young people. One aspect of how we improve is the role of parents — you were right about this — particularly parents who had bad educational experiences or are from a background where, perhaps, education was not as valued as it should have been in the family home.

Recently, I launched a television advertising campaign that spoke directly to all parents, particularly those who, perhaps, are not sure how exactly they should involve themselves in their child's education. They did not have a great education themselves and so wonder, "How do I do this? I cannot do it. It is the role of a professional". It is as simple as reading your child a bedtime story; fun ways of counting with your child; talking to your child about their day at school; encouraging your child; and ensuring that your child is at school — even at primary school and preschool. All those simple steps will instil the value of education in children and assist them to develop into everything that they can be.

Early years education is, probably, one of the areas with which I am most familiar. I am the father of a seven-year-old, a four-year-old and a four-month-old, so I am going through the stages of early education and recognise the different elements of it. Most of us in the Chamber lead a very busy life. One of the best ways to relax in the evening, if you get home on time, is to sit down and read your child a bedtime story. You may be stressed out, but, when you sit down and read your child a bedtime story, it brings a calming end to both of your days and plays an important role in your child's education. My simple message to all parents is to read to their children and talk to them about education.

Mr Allister: If the Minister wants to build a successful system, why does it have to involve dismantling existing reception classes, where the experience of many children has been positive? Is there not a danger of creating uniformity for uniformity's sake with no regard to what has been working for some?

Mr O'Dowd: It may well have worked for some, but I am not sure on what basis the Member makes that assertion. Research shows that reception classes are not

offering appropriate education to the children involved. Bringing three-year-olds into primary 1 classes is not age-appropriate education. It can even stymie a child's development. Therefore, it is more important to bring age-appropriate education to primary-school children rather than just fitting them into a class or sector and saying,

"We have looked after that child. They are in somewhere. Just leave them there, and they will eventually move on through the system".

Reception classes are outdated and outmoded and are not age-appropriate. They may well have worked for some, but they do not work for all. There is a better way. Let us make preschool provision available to all. Let us ensure that children have access to age-appropriate education. Then, let them move on to primary school. That is the best way forward.

11.15 am

Mr Lyttle: Parental involvement in raising educational attainment and aspiration has been mentioned. What provision will the early years framework make for training to help parents learn how best to read with their children at home?

Mr O'Dowd: As part of the advertising campaign that I launched earlier this year, back-up training material is available on the web, in libraries etc to allow parents access to the information that they require. When parents see the advertisements on the side of a bus, at bus stops, in supermarkets and, indeed, on television, they can access the relevant information quite handily and decide what is the best way for them to engage with their child. So, information is available. I intend to continue rolling out the advertisement campaign and developing the back-up material.

One of the earlier questions asked how we learn from other countries and international support. The back-up material that we have is largely from Scotland. Scotland rolled out a programme of work to enable and support parents through the provision of information. Scotland kindly shared that information with us and allowed us to use and adapt it to our own needs. So, we are now using it as well. That shows how we can co-operate with each other across these islands.

Health: Promoting Innovation

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly on promoting innovation in health and social care. It is timely to make such a statement this week. It is almost a year since my colleague the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I made statements to the Assembly setting out our shared agenda for Connected Health and prosperity. It is, therefore, appropriate to now provide an update to the House on the significant progress that has been made over the past 12 months.

It is also a year since the official launch of Telemonitoring NI, our award-winning remote telemonitoring service. The service is being rolled out to thousands of patients, and an ever-increasing number of people in Northern Ireland benefit from the ability to have their long-term conditions regularly monitored from the comfort of their own home.

Recent developments in the arena of research and development and how that is used to support healthcare provide exciting possibilities for the improvement of services, as well as the life sciences sector, to the benefit of patients and the economy.

There are strong reasons why my Department and the health and social care sector should focus on supporting and encouraging those areas of development. We have the fastest growing population in the UK, as well as an unusually young population. We also have more rapid ageing of the population structure than most other regions. It is estimated that, in the 11 years from 2009 to 2020, the number of people over 75 will increase by 40% and, with that, the incidence of long-term conditions, hence the need for a radical and strategic approach to management.

At this time, we also face challenging economic circumstances, with increasingly constrained financial resources and increasing budgetary pressures. Transforming Your Care sets out clearly the challenges we face and the compelling need for change. Connected Health and innovation have key roles to play in meeting the challenges to our health and social care sector. We cannot afford to ignore the potential contribution that they can make. The reason behind my Department's joint work with Invest NI is to advance co-operation on Connected Health across the clinical, academic and industrial sectors not just to improve patient care, which is my priority, but to ensure that we maximise the economic development opportunities that cross-sectoral collaboration can bring.

Over the past year, there have been significant milestones. The introduction of the electronic care record will improve patient safety and will enable many other developments. The Connected Health and prosperity memorandum of understanding, signed by the economy Minister and me on 6 December last year, committed to the production of a strategic action plan, which was produced in September. A core element of that plan was the establishment of a Northern Ireland Connected Health ecosystem, a forum where clinicians, researchers and industry can come together to share and develop ideas. The ecosystem was launched in September and will facilitate greater collaboration on addressing challenges in health and social care and on finding solutions. It is due to hold its second meeting later this month. Its initial focus, not surprisingly, is on how it can best support key areas

of the work planned under Transforming Your Care. In addition, the recently published Northern Ireland Executive economy and jobs initiative makes a commitment to establish a group under the remit of the Connected Health and prosperity board, which my Department and Invest NI lead, to identify the economic opportunities from the health and social care sector.

There have also been developments further afield. Northern Ireland has made a number of commitments within the European innovation partnership on active and healthy ageing and has applied for candidate reference status under the initiative, which means promoting Northern Ireland as a leading region in Europe in the area of innovation to address health and social care challenges. Our involvement is providing us with the opportunity to share experiences with regions across the European Union and to work together towards the achievement of the challenging Commission target of increasing by two years the healthy life expectancy of a child born in 2020. We also work closely with partners throughout Europe and further afield through the European Connected Health Alliance, sharing learning, experiences and joint developments.

In October, I represented Northern Ireland at the EU-US eHealth Marketplace event in Boston, an opportunity to raise our profile among leaders in the field from around the world. I visited the Basque region in May this year to share experiences with my counterparts on the use of technology in health and social care and chronic condition management. That visit resulted in the agreement of a memorandum of understanding with the Basque region formalising our plans to work together to the benefit of both regions. The Basque Health Minister and I signed the memorandum in Belfast on 22 November. That will help to build on collaboration already under way between the Basque region and the South Eastern Trust in the area of learning networks.

We already have a lot of knowledge that could extend people's healthy lives. However, there are many other things that we do not know or understand, so we need to focus on specific knowledge gaps. I am very pleased to see that, in line with the Assembly's wish to increase EU funding, clinicians across the HSC are working with academics and business to submit proposals for substantial R&D funding. A number of proposals have already been successful. I congratulate those involved on their success and encourage others to explore the potential for support of their R&D efforts.

In keeping with our aim to be at the forefront of R&D, innovation and use of technology, my Department and Invest NI are exploring opportunities for an event at the European Parliament at the end of January, including an exhibition to showcase Connected Health in Northern Ireland. In addition, the Republic of Ireland will hold the presidency of the EU in 2013. As part of the presidency, the Irish Government will host an e-health week in May. That will include a high-level e-health conference on 13 and 14 May that will run in parallel with the World of Health IT conference and exhibition. That should provide an opportunity to invite key individuals and interests attending the conference to visit Northern Ireland to see and learn at first hand how we are moving the e-health agenda forward.

Research and development plays a vital part in promoting innovation in health. In July 2012, I launched 'Evaluation of the Impact of HSC R&D Funding in Northern Ireland'.

I commissioned that report on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer, specifically to evaluate the benefits of research and development to the health and social care system and the wider economy. One of the most significant findings of the independent report was that every £1 invested in research and development had generated £4.14 of income in the form of further grants or other funding for clinical studies. The report recommended that Northern Ireland should contribute to the joint funding managed through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) in England. By making that investment, Northern Ireland researchers would be able to compete in selected research programmes alongside colleagues from across the UK. For the first time, we have concrete evidence of the additional income brought in by our investment in R&D, in addition to its beneficial impact on health and social care.

My immediate response to the report was to commit to contributing to NIHR and thereby create opportunities for researchers based in Northern Ireland. We appreciate the way in which our involvement was warmly welcomed and supported by colleagues in NIHR and the Department of Health in England. Our researchers now have access to an annual funding pot of over £75 million and will be able to compete on an equal footing with researchers from other UK countries. They will also gain the opportunity to join research partnerships that could draw down larger amounts of money from other sources.

Although that investment is good news for Northern Ireland's HSC, it will also provide a timely boost for our wider economy and bring real scientific, health and economic gains. The PHA will support researchers to benefit from that new opportunity and build on the excellent work done by our current researchers. Northern Ireland has a proud history of cutting-edge research in health. The investment will help to ensure that we build on that tradition. Research is a cornerstone of reform, and innovation is a catalyst for improvement. As we move forward with Transforming Your Care, such investments will be crucial to the reform of our health and social care system.

The evaluation report also makes other recommendations that are being taken forward by the Department and the PHA. They include increased emphasis on aligning research with policy questions that we need to answer to inform the future of health and social care, as well as supporting research that addresses questions arising directly from clinical practice. We also want to provide increased opportunities for commercial development through collaboration with businesses that are based locally or elsewhere and ongoing opportunities to build further on the research findings.

I stress our underlying aim of benefiting patients through investment in maximising access to clinical trials, allowing patients access to new treatments, and through increasing knowledge in the HSC. I want to raise the profile of R&D and have it recognised as an integral part of the work of HSC organisations. However, R&D goes wider than just Health and Social Care. I want to ensure that our universities, commercial organisations and Invest NI work collaboratively to maximise the full range of new opportunities that we have at this time. A new strategy for health and social care R&D is under development at present. I plan to launch it early next year. That

overarching strategy will include the recommendations of the evaluation report and will set out the way forward.

With pressing targets to meet, it would be easy for me, as Health Minister, to focus simply on how technological developments can help to meet short-term needs and pressures. However, it is vital that we take a longer-term view. Health services generate a massive number of records, and the information stored in those records is invaluable in ensuring that every patient receives the correct treatment and care. The records can also be extremely valuable in other ways. They help politicians, policymakers, managers and health and social care professionals to plan, develop and deliver the right services to the right people. Through research on patient records, we can understand better the occurrence or spread of illnesses or find out which services or treatments are most effective for particular conditions. It is, of course, absolutely vital that patient confidentiality is respected. Northern Ireland has high-quality systems in place for the safe and secure storage of patients' confidential healthcare records. However, it is possible to respect that and still gain the great benefits that R&D can offer by using data that is anonymised and cannot be tracked back to an individual patient. I recognise that, locally, we need to make changes so that the right people can gain access to anonymised records. In common with partner health Departments across the UK, officials are putting in place a new system that will provide access while maintaining patient confidentiality and anonymity. We call it an honest broker service. It will provide a robust process to support the safe and secure sharing of anonymised health information to support ethically approved health and social care-related research.

It is not only for our own planning purposes that access to data is vital; researchers and business will dedicate their resources to health only if they feel that they will get the co-operation and support that they need to achieve their goals, including product development. That is partly economic support, but it is more than that: it is the co-operation of clinicians in explaining their needs; it is access to the data that they need for research; and it is co-operation in the trial stage of product development. Interestingly, the very technological developments that come out of research allow us to collect data electronically with more efficiency and effectiveness than ever before. Therefore, it is appropriate to ensure that that data can be used to benefit the individuals from whom it was collected, in the overall interest of public health and the development of health-related policy. As I have outlined, the information also has the potential, with appropriate safeguards, to support economic development.

I have provided an update on the developments in Connected Health, research and development and promoting innovation since my statement a year ago. It is an important and fast-changing area for our health service. Northern Ireland has much to offer in those areas and much to gain. We must, therefore, continue to build on the significant progress that has already been made. I commend the statement to the House.

11.30 am

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. Is national R&D money available to the Northern Ireland health service through the small business initiative,

which we have recently been made aware of through the Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ETI) Committee?

Mr Poots: We can apply for money from a range of areas. One of the more recent ones is the National Institute for Health Research, which has a funding pot of £75 million. Our universities believe that they are well placed to get considerably more than the £2 million investment that we have put in. Also, the opportunity for collaboration with other universities across the UK will lever in considerably more money from other sources. Outside of that, there are other opportunities for investment in innovation, locally, nationally and, indeed, at European level. It is our task to ensure that we maximise the ability of our key research teams, universities and businesses to be able to access such funding and lever in additional investment from elsewhere.

On a very positive note, in the past few weeks one of the largest pharmaceutical companies has actually agreed to establish a base in Northern Ireland. We are seeing Northern Ireland being noticed by people who have a really major contribution to make in health and social care research.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Minister for his statement. I commend the officers and the Minister himself for the initiative that they have shown in driving this forward. As the Minister will well know, the rolling out of e-health technology will require good broadband coverage across the North. There are still pockets that do not have access — or not good access — to broadband. Will the Minister tell us what discussions he has had with the ETI and Agriculture and Rural Development Ministers in relation to ensuring coverage throughout?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. She is right. There are pockets in Northern Ireland where broadband availability is not good, but they are pockets. Northern Ireland is one of the most advanced regions in its availability of broadband to the general public. I have been to other places where they are absolutely amazed that in Northern Ireland we have superhighways running between our towns and villages, whilst their technology virtually has single-track lanes. We are in a position of advantage in all this, because of the good broadband services that we have. I know that the ETI Minister is continuing to work with communities where broadband is still a problem, one of which is in my constituency. I will continue to encourage her to find solutions for the small number of pockets that exist.

Mr McCarthy: In his statement, the Minister spoke of the overarching strategy, which will include the recommendations of the evaluation report and will set out the way forward. The Minister stated that there have been developments further afield, namely in the Basque region and Boston. The Minister will be aware that, as we speak, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Health Committee are visiting Cuba to see how it provides the best healthcare in the world.

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr McCarthy: I am coming to the question.

Will their report, made when they return, be factored in to the Minister's evaluation report and strategy, to be launched, as he states, early next year?

Mr Poots: I will certainly be very happy to listen to what the Chair and Deputy Chair have to say. I always listen to what the Chair and Deputy Chair have to say when it comes to health matters. I greatly appreciate the support that they give and the information they provide. I suspect one thing they probably will find in Cuba is that huge amounts of money are being pumped in from Venezuela, through the Hugo Chávez regime, to support the health service in Cuba. Consequently, the people in Venezuela have not seen the benefit of being such an oil-rich country. Many of those people are impoverished, because Mr Chávez offers such support to the Cuban regime.

Mr G Robinson: Can the security of patient data really be guaranteed?

Mr Poots: To make progress, it is absolutely essential that that is the case. Were such data to fall into the wrong hands, the public would be reluctant and reticent for it to be used. An honest-broker system will provide a robust process to support the safe and secure sharing of anonymised health information in ethically approved health-related research. Non-anonymised data is released only when a patient has given fully informed consent in advance — for instance, when he or she has chosen to be part of an organised clinical trial. In all that, we would not ask patients for the opportunity to use their information to advance health and social care unless we were absolutely confident that we could keep their details anonymous and, therefore, without any impact on their personal lives.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his statement and congratulate him for his accomplishments to date. Does he agree that he must now, as a matter of priority, address the fact that Northern Ireland has the highest non-attendance rate in the United Kingdom for clinical appointments, and does he agree that using short message services technology should be used to tackle that problem?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, in his own area, the Southern Trust received two national awards last year for moving forward in innovation, and it has been particularly to the fore in telemonitoring. I agree that we have all sorts of communication methods that we must use to maximum effect to ensure that we get full efficiency in our health and social care system. Certainly, the methods that the Member referred to are widely used in a range of fields, and we are happy that that is also the case in the health service. It would be positive to continue to drive that forward and ensure that the number of people missing appointments is reduced.

Mr Beggs: Telemonitoring has been used in Northern Ireland for over a year, so will the Minister give us an update on the range of conditions that are deemed suitable for its use and the feedback from patients, GPs and consultants?

Mr Poots: Up to mid-November, approximately 2,500 people in Northern Ireland had benefited from remote telemonitoring since its introduction, around half of those since the regional contract was put in place. We have 124 who have been referred and await its installation.

Telemonitoring is a means of reading vital signs and passing them to the central database, which will demonstrate whether there is stress. Telemonitoring can be of significant benefit for conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, diabetes and circulatory issues. Those records can come

to the central database and, when there are those signs of stress, be dispensed very quickly to a district nurse, who can take action.

I called on a gentleman in Larne, in the Member's constituency, who is suffering from COPD. He indicated that, in, I think, the previous two years, he had had approximately 12 attendances at Antrim A&E and had been admitted to hospital a number of times. Since going onto telemonitoring, I think that he had had one attendance at A&E. That demonstrates its effectiveness, particularly, in this gentleman's case, for COPD.

Ms Brown: I welcome the Minister's statement. What proof is there that telemonitoring is cost-effective?

Mr Poots: Before we decided to invest, a whole system demonstrator evaluation conducted in England highlighted the positive impact of telemonitoring on reducing A&E visits, emergency admissions, elective admissions and bed days. It also highlighted a reduction in tariff costs, although the use of tariffs is specific to the NHS funding system that operates in England.

Increasingly, the evidence from other large-scale studies internationally highlights the cost-effectiveness of telemonitoring, including the example of the Veterans Association, where a large-scale programme has reported a 25% reduction in bed days. I believe that Northern Ireland will be in a leading position to inform other EU countries on telemonitoring. That is why we have applied for regional status. If accepted by the European Union, we will be a reference site. Currently, the EU is looking for five or six reference sites. If we gain that status, it will place Northern Ireland as a leader in health innovation in Europe, and others will look to our example. We should not underestimate the powerful contribution that we can make to health and social care, not just in Northern Ireland but beyond these shores.

Mr Dallat: I also welcome the Minister's statement. He said that, over the next few years, the ageing population will increase by 40%. I am sure that the Minister will agree that that age group could benefit enormously from telemonitoring. How will the Minister ensure that this programme comes to their attention, and what support will they have to ensure that they take full advantage of telemonitoring for their particular health conditions?

Mr Poots: This will be conducted through GPs and in association with the trusts. At present, some trusts are more effective than others, so we need to encourage everyone to get involved. The money is set aside to do that, and the capability is there to do it. The uptake has been good, and we would like to continue to maintain and even build on the momentum to ensure that we fully benefit from the investment being made here. We want to ensure that people with chronic conditions, particularly older people, can receive that support. We want to ensure that they do not end up in hospital because their condition has been allowed to deteriorate to that extent.

Committee Business

Unadopted Roads: Committee for Regional Development Report

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

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): I beg to move

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Regional Development on its inquiry into unadopted roads in Northern Ireland (NIA 44/11/15); and calls on the Minister for Regional Development, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues and relevant bodies, to implement the recommendations.

Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Tá mé sásta an rún ar an tuairisc a thabhairt os comhair an Tí inniu ar son Chathaoirleach agus baill an Choiste Forbartha Réigiúnaí. I am pleased to bring the report to the House today on behalf of the Chair and members of the Committee for Regional Development. I pass on my best wishes to Jimmy, the Chair, who is recovering.

The Committee first received a presentation on the increasing number of unadopted roads in the North of Ireland from NILGA on 18 January 2012. Following that presentation, the Committee agreed to undertake an inquiry into unadopted roads. It has been a lengthy process, during which time the Committee heard some horrific stories of residents of unfinished housing developments being left liable for thousands of pounds because roads or sewers were unfinished and unadopted.

I should state at the outset that the Committee is sympathetic to developers who find themselves struggling in very testing economic times. The recommendations contained in the report are not intended as a criticism of contractors. Rather, the Committee believes them to be pragmatic recommendations aimed at ensuring that consumers are afforded greater protection. I hope that the Minister and other Members will agree with the Committee on that point.

11.45 am

During the inquiry, the Committee was advised that there were anything between 1,200 and 3,500 unadopted roads and some 1,200 sewerage schemes in backlog. The Department for Regional Development (DRD) and NI Water are unable to quantify the precise numbers, which the Committee believed was a serious weakness in itself.

Recommendations to negate that weakness have been made and are detailed later in the report. It was also estimated that it would take some £300 million to bring roads up to a standard that is sufficient to allow for adoption and somewhere between £41 million and £100 million to allow for the adoption of sewerage and wastewater schemes.

As could be expected in today's economic climate, it is extremely unlikely that those levels of investment could be acquired from central government. The Committee is

not suggesting that actions cannot be taken to rectify this significant problem; rather, it believes that a co-ordinated effort by all sectors involved in the process could see major improvements in the most critical cases.

I want to discuss the inquiry's main findings. As I said, the Department and NI Water are not in a position to quantify either the extent of unadopted roads and sewers or the cost of the remedial works that are necessary to rectify the problem. NILGA brought that issue to the Committee, and, during the inquiry, the Committee received a significant amount of evidence from individuals and local councillors of the devastating effects that unadopted roads and sewers can have on residents and their properties.

The resources that are required to undertake the righting of all defects are not available. However, the Committee does not believe that this should be the end of the matter, and it recommends that NILGA co-ordinate a prioritisation audit in each council area. Such an audit should list the numbers of unadopted infrastructures and apply an agreed grading that is based on the risks to public health and safety. That would allow for priority-based intervention bids by the Department and/or NI Water, should sufficient resources be made available.

Having briefly mentioned resources, I want to discuss the bond. Prior to the separation of Water Service and the Department in 2006, roads and sewers were legislated for in the Private Streets Order 1980. A number of respondents, particularly those from the construction industry, raised concerns that, as a result of that segregation, there was a requirement for two bonds, one each for roads and sewers. The industry and bond providers claimed that, when there was one piece of legislation, the cost of providing dual coverage had risen to £7,500 from approximately £3,000. Although the Committee does not wish to prohibit recovery in the construction industry, it has received sufficient evidence to indicate that the level of bond coverage is insufficient to cover remedial works that might be required to bring infrastructures to a standard where they could be adopted.

In addition, given that the process for calling in the bond can take a significant period of time, it is often the case that costs have been increased by a compounded inflationary figure. That has the significant potential to expose the statutory authorities and, ultimately, the taxpayer to that burden. The Committee recommends, therefore, that statutory providers and representatives of the construction and financial sectors agree a bond level that is acceptable to all parties and that includes an inflationary amount.

As indicated, the process for triggering the bond is lengthy and complex, particularly where a developer has gone into liquidation. There are a number of occasions when the statutory bodies have not been advised that a developer is in liquidation until a significant period of time passed. The Committee is also not content that the Department is waiting for up to 18 months after a developer has received the preliminary certificate. The Committee believes that, although not intentional by the Department, the process does not take into account the very significant risk of residents' safety, aside from the major inconvenience caused. The Committee recommends that the Department review its procedures with a view to ensuring that there is a more prompt reaction to calling in the bond. The process

should be aimed at alleviating public health and safety risks to residents.

The primary pieces of legislation for the adoption of roads and sewers are as follows: the Private Streets Order 1980; the Private Streets (Amendment) Order 1992; and the Water and Sewerage Services Order 2006. The Committee was concerned that the legislation is outdated, being 30 years old and 20 years old respectively. Members were also concerned that the principles of the orders do not adequately recognise the current economic circumstances or those of the consumer.

The Committee is also extremely concerned that there is no mandatory requirement in the 2006 order for a developer to submit a drainage plan to building control or even enter into an agreement with NIW over a bond. The Committee considers those to be major flaws that need to be redressed urgently.

We considered the merits of having one order to consolidate the legislation. However, the Committee is mindful of the fact that there is a degree of urgency with the review of the legislation and is content to recommend that the Minister urgently review the private streets legislation to ensure that it has adequate measures to deal with the increasing occurrences of unadopted roads.

In addition, the Committee recommends that the 2006 order be reviewed to bring it into line with the Private Streets Order to provide detailed plans to Building Control and close the loophole through which a developer can choose whether to enter into a bond agreement.

In all our deliberations, protection of the consumer — the resident — was to the fore. A number of respondents raised concerns about the level of detail contained in the property certificate, particularly the absence of adequate information on the condition of roads and sewers. That would potentially have an adverse impact on vendors should the property be resold. In addition, there were complaints that, although the Department could be contacted frequently by developers and the legal profession, those dealing with the real impact of unadopted infrastructures — the residents — were not afforded the same access and were not privy to the same level of information.

The Committee believes that the onus to identify potential issues lies with the legal profession and is best carried out during its searches in respect of the resale of properties. The Committee recommends therefore that the property certificate should be adapted to include legal opinion on the condition of the roads and sewers and whether they have been adopted. It should advise potential vendors of the consequences that non-adoption will have for them. The Committee recommends that the legal profession, in conjunction with other stakeholders, compile a guide for vendors that will include information on, for example, their rights and entitlements, resolution techniques and dealing with administration and/or bonding services.

Consumers must be afforded an opportunity to access and challenge government bodies in the same way as developers and the legal profession. The Committee believes that if an appropriate system were in place, the Department and/or NI Water could adapt it to aid in the quicker triggering of the bond enforcement processes. The Committee recommends therefore that a code of practice or protocol be compiled advising of the structures in place,

or being put in place, to effect the prompt triggering of bond enforcement.

The Committee was struck by the number of organisations and stakeholders involved in the process, from construction to residents, and, in very many cases, beyond that. The Committee was also cognisant that each stakeholder had its own agenda and that a collective view of, or challenge to, the problem was not particularly evident. The Committee believes therefore that a greater degree of co-ordination and co-operation is required to address the problems associated with unadopted roads and sewers.

The Committee recommends that a co-operation forum is established to agree how the issue of unadopted roads and sewers can be dealt with collectively. Without being prescriptive, it should be representative of residents, statutory and local government bodies, contractors, bonds services and the legal profession. The Committee suggests that the body define its own terms of reference but that it may wish to establish the level of bonds, compile codes of practice, protocols and information packs, and assess whether the current and future legislative provisions are sufficient.

I am sure that, during the debate, Members will recount individual instances of unadopted roads and sewers in their own constituencies. That will provide further evidence that urgent action is needed to address the situation. We are sympathetic to developers and the construction industry and want to see that important sector revitalised. That is why we fully support the Executive's efforts to bolster the construction industry through investment in, for example, major road infrastructure projects. However, we must also remember that the people who put us in this place are the very people who, through no fault of their own, are being faced with liabilities running into tens of thousands of pounds; who must drag their refuse 200 yards for collection; and who purchased their properties in good faith. They are the people who the inquiry seeks to put first. They are the people who should be put first. They are the people who I believe the Committee has put first in making these recommendations.

I move the motion and hope that the House supports the Committee for Regional Development in its efforts to protect the consumer.

Mr I McCrea: I welcome the debate. I welcome the Minister and thank him for attending. I look forward to hearing what he has to say in response to the debate. I join the Deputy Chair in commending the Committee on the time that it spent working on this inquiry. Most importantly, it would be remiss of me not to refer to the Committee Clerk and the staff under him who had the hard job of putting all this together and trying to guide the Committee through the process. We are thankful for that.

As the Deputy Chair highlighted, we had evidence sessions with a number of different organisations as part of our inquiry. We received quite a number of responses from councils across Northern Ireland. No one will be surprised to hear that one of those was from Cookstown District Council, of which I am a member. At the time of the report, there were around 3,148 roads that were determined for adoption but had not yet been adopted. Of those, 107 were in Cookstown and 99 were in Magherafelt. I will not bore the House by going through each of the 107

in Cookstown and 99 in Magherafelt, but the Minister will be more than aware of them. I hope that those numbers will become a lot smaller in the not too distant future.

The issues raised in response to the inquiry were pretty much the same from council to council. It is important that we highlight some of those today.

12.00 noon

The main issue, which will not surprise anyone, was refuse collection. In many areas, insurance was a major problem for councils, because companies either refused or put high premiums on vehicles entering unadopted roads. As the Deputy Chair said, that brings the problem where councils decide that they can no longer enter a development that has an unadopted road. The result of that is that people have to bring their bins to the edge of their estate, which has health and safety implications. Those people have purchased their homes, and they pay the same rates as those who get their bins collected, yet they feel that they are, on many occasions, treated as second-class citizens.

There are many recommendations. I will not go through them; they are detailed in the report. I have read the Minister's initial response to the recommendations. I give credit where it is due, and I welcome the Minister's response. It is important that we change the way things are and ensure that bonds are used much more quickly than they have been, more so in developments where the developers have gone bankrupt and have left the estates in a mess. It is important that we get around that issue.

As a member of the Committee, I look forward to working with the Minister as we move forward on this issue. I assure him that I and my party will not be found wanting when it comes to trying to move this thing forward.

Mr Hussey: I begin by pointing out that I joined the Committee on 23 April 2012, and you will note how hard they have worked since then.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about the Committee's inquiry into unadopted roads in Northern Ireland. Anyone who has a background in local government will know that this particular issue causes many headaches for those who have bought houses in developments where the roads have not been adopted and, consequently, bins are not collected by the local council from the estate but from the nearest public road. In my constituency of West Tyrone, we have 146 unadopted roads.

Our recommendations are not overly complex, but they attempt to assist the Minister and his Department by bringing some of the long-standing issues to a head and trying to provide a framework by which we can move forward. Clearly, this problem has been about for a long time, and it predates the appointment of the current Minister. I thank the Minister for his support to the Committee.

On 7 February 2012, he stated:

"I recognise the concerns of local home owners who find themselves in new housing developments, where developers have left roads and sewerage systems unfinished. Roads Service and NI Water are making use of the current legislation and procedures to address these problems but this process takes time to

complete ... I will ensure Roads Service and NI Water officials are available to the Committee throughout their inquiry process."

There is no doubt that the Minister and his team did that.

As someone who has a background in financial services, I am well aware that the cost of a bond is based on the financial risk that the financial institution granting the bond has to undertake. We seem to have been reluctant to enforce bonds. In my time as a councillor, I found it very frustrating, when attempting to push for a resolution, that Roads Service seemed to be reluctant to force the hand of the developer in relation to the bond. For that reason, I welcome the recommendation that the Department review its procedures with a view to ensuring a more prompt reaction to calling in the bond. That process should be aimed at alleviating public health and safety risks to residents.

In conjunction with that recommendation, it makes sense to follow with a further recommendation for a code of practice or a protocol to be compiled, advising of the structures that are in place to effect the prompt triggering of bond enforcement.

Obviously, because of time constraints, I cannot and, I am sure you will be relieved to hear, will not be going through all the recommendations. I fully support all the recommendations, but priority must be given to our recommendation for a prioritisation audit to be done in each council area. That must be completed as quickly as possible, and the process of priority-based intervention must be implemented as soon as funds become available.

Many of us have problems in our constituencies with unadopted roads. They are in various villages and towns, where people are concerned that their home is no longer their home because of problems on the roads or in the sewerage infrastructure. That was fully evident in our report and our inquiry. Overall, I welcome the report and urge its implementation as soon as possible.

Mr Dallat: I am delighted to speak on the report today, and my first thoughts are with our Chairman, Jimmy Spratt. Jimmy, if you are looking in — I am sure that you are — I assure you that the absence of Members does not indicate a lack of interest in the report, which affects every part of Northern Ireland.

When the report was drawn up, it set out five key objectives, and I believe that it has achieved them. The first objective was to put a cost on bringing roads and sewers up to an acceptable standard, and my sympathy goes out to the Minister because of the money that he needs to find to ensure that that happens. Members will agree that the concept of a voluntary undertaking or agreement has not worked. Time and time again, Members get the runaround when trying to find out who is responsible for a particular problem. That needs to end, and we need to find a solution, arising out of the report, to put an end to that. The report sets out good reasons for dramatic changes that will compel property sellers to provide the most detailed information not only on the property but on the whole network of sewers and roads in the vicinity. Very often, the problem may not be at someone's own doorstep but may be further down the road. I am sure that most Members know of such cases.

The issue of unadopted roads and sewers has probably been about since Roman times. I am sure that some historian will point out that the issue goes back long before that. I suggest that the time has come to put an end to it, and, quite frankly, I do not see that happening without new legislation to enforce particular procedures to ensure that it happens. The recent downturn in the property market here and in the Republic has brought to a head the absolute urgency of putting the issue in focus. I can think of one terrible incident in the Republic in which a child was drowned on a site that was not completed. I am not aware of anything like that in the North, and, please God, that it will not happen.

During our fact finding, we met a lot of people, and one of the most tetchy — if I can use that word — meetings was with the Law Society, at which we indicated that we believed that its members should be made more amenable to their involvement in conveyancing and should ensure that all the services that are supposed to be in place are in place. From correspondence with the Law Society, I know that it was not too happy about that, but all Members here will agree that there is an onus on solicitors, most of whom carry out their work exceptionally well and professionally. However, a few have made big bucks out of property and have not delivered, and I have no doubt that Members around the Chamber are then left with the task of trying to unravel what has been left as unfinished business, which is sometimes not easy.

I have no doubt that the Assembly will adopt the report, but I have one concern about the resources that are needed to address the problems it highlights. As I said earlier, the Minister will have our full support in ensuring that those unfinished estates and faulty sewers, some of which have been giving problems for years on end, can be addressed in a new way. If we do that during the lifetime of this Assembly mandate, we can claim success, despite the fact that not many Members turned up for the debate.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Dickson: I welcome the report, and I place on record my thanks to fellow members of the Committee for Regional Development and, in particular, to the Clerk, staff and all who contributed to what I consider to be an excellent report. Indeed, this is an effective example of democracy at work. A problem was highlighted, and the Committee has investigated and made recommendations to help to remedy what is a genuine situation for many people. We now look forward in anticipation to the response of the Minister and the Department.

That our report's estimate of the number of unadopted roads is anywhere between 1,200 and 3,500 speaks for itself about the level of uncertainty surrounding the issue. It also highlights neglect and the fact that there has been no concerted effort thus far to co-ordinate a large-scale, multiagency response to the problem. The scale is immense. We are told to never say never in politics, at least most of us are, but, at a cost of between £340 million and £400 million, it is very tempting to say that there is no chance that the Assembly will pay to bring all affected roads and sewers up to adoption standard, particularly given the absolutely dire financial situation that already affects, for example, our water and sewerage infrastructure and services.

With this in mind, the Committee's very sensible recommendation is that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) co-ordinate and prioritise an audit to allow for the possibility that the unadopted roads and infrastructure causing risks to public health and safety could be addressed by the Department and/or Northern Ireland Water (NIW). This is, in my view, a sensible way for us to try to deal with the existing problems. If investment is forthcoming from either of these sources, it is appropriate that priority be given to areas causing the most harm and damage.

We could also benefit from better co-operation and awareness from all parties involved. We, too, were told of examples of Northern Ireland Water not being formally notified when a developer goes into administration. We were also informed that it may enter into property agreements, unaware of the status of roads and sewers and the consequences of non-adoption. It seems that greater awareness from and contact between the stakeholders could help significantly, so the recommendations set out in points 21, 22 and 24 are particularly welcome.

We must also look forward to putting in place legislation and measures to prevent the appearance of many more unadopted roads and structures. It is very concerning that there is no mandatory requirement in the Water and Sewerage Services Order (Northern Ireland) 2006 for the developer to submit a drainage plan to Building Control or to enter into an agreement with Northern Ireland Water in respect of a bond. Moreover, we note that the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 does not adequately recognise the current economic circumstances or those of the consumer. There are major flaws that need to be addressed urgently. Perhaps they could have been dealt with in the upcoming water Bill had there been more forward thinking from the Department, but it is clear that there is a strong case for legislative change, so I encourage the Minister to bring forward proposals as soon as possible to address the legislative failings identified in the report.

The Assembly and the Executive have a duty to assist those affected by the economic downturn where they can. The Committee has made clear recommendations to assist all of those affected or potentially affected by the problem of unadopted roads across Northern Ireland. As a member of the Committee, I support these recommendations. I urge Members in the Chamber to support them, and, in particular, I urge the Minister to act on them as soon as possible.

Mr Easton: In Northern Ireland today, there are a number of unadopted roads. This has a dramatic impact on the residents of unfinished developments and on the reputation of the building trade. A balancing act needs to be achieved between the householder, who often innocently faces the consequences of residing in a development with an unadopted road, and the builders, who report a substantial rise in the cost of the required bonds. Obviously, in these tough economic times that extra financial burden can have a significant impact on a struggling sector.

12.15 pm

An unadopted road is defined as one where a bond has been put in place and one about which the Department is not satisfied that the street has been levelled, paved,

channelled, made good and lighted. Obviously, if a road is not deemed to have met those criteria, that will have a serious impact on residents. There have been cases where residents have been unaware that, if they live on an unadopted road and repairs need to be made to the sewerage system, they are responsible both for ensuring that those repairs are completed and for their cost. If the street is not properly maintained and built, there are dangers to personal safety, especially where street lighting in the dark winter months is concerned.

There are also issues surrounding what happens when homeowners want to sell their property and move on to pastures new. Prospective house buyers may receive legal advice not to purchase property on unadopted roads, and that can have a serious impact on innocent homeowners who are not experts in the field and who have purchased houses in good faith.

I believe strongly that the vast majority of builders in Northern Ireland want to do their best for the future residents of the homes and business premises that they construct. In the construction trade, personal reputation is often a builder's best asset in securing future work. After all, Northern Ireland can be very small place, and bad news often travels faster than good. For that reason, I believe that our good builders should be supported in their endeavours in this difficult economic time.

Since 2006, when the bond system was split into two separate bond requirements, the cost has risen from approximately £3,000 to £7,500. Against that rise, however, there is also a concern that often the bond level is not sufficient to cover the work that is required to bring the infrastructure to a state where it can be adopted. A balance needs to be achieved in such a situation, and I believe that the report allows for that avenue to be explored further.

I support the report's recommendations, and I believe that, by implementing them and ensuring that there are closer working relationships between consumers, builders and local and regional authorities, we can continue to be confident in the construction industry. I particularly welcome the closing of legal loopholes and the extension of property certificates to cover the condition of roads and sewerage. Those certificates are very important in protecting the consumer. The re-examination of the level of the bond and the burden that it places on builders at this time is also extremely welcome. It will allow for dialogue to begin between those who are completing the work and those who have to pay when things ultimately go wrong. I also appreciate that the proposed register, along with the recommended grading of the most serious problems, will allow local authorities to address the most serious and dangerous situations as a priority.

I support the report.

Mr McAleer: Thank you, a Cheann Comhairle. I take the opportunity to support the motion. I commend the Committee and the officials, particularly Paul, Nathan, Tara and Alison and all the others who were involved in initiating this hugely important report into unadopted roads and housing developments.

As I found out, this is a very complex and multifaceted issue, and I am glad to note that the report's recommendations avoid attributing blame. Their thrust aims to achieve a consensus among all the relevant parties.

From dealing with residents, I know how frustrating it can be. People purchase a new home. They take great care of and pride in that home, but that is completely undermined by the fact that their home is in the middle of an unfinished site, where there is no street lighting, manhole lids protrude and the sewerage system is not complete. They may have the added complication of bin lorries being unable to enter the development for insurance reasons. Coupled with that, the economic downturn has had a hugely adverse impact on our construction and building industry. Unfortunately, many of the developers of those unfinished sites have gone into liquidation and do not have the means to complete the sites to a standard that is fit for adoption.

Adopted roads and developments are legislated for under the Private Streets Order. I support the report's finding that the order is outdated and in need of review. As was mentioned, there is a major flaw in it that means that developers do not have to submit a drainage plan or enter into an agreement with NI Water. As John Dallat said, that can have major public health implications, so it is imperative that the Water and Sewerage Services Order is brought into line with the Private Streets Order 1980.

Planning Service also has a very important role to play, particularly to ensure that all the conditions are met for sewers, rivers and roads. I consider it a major legislative flaw that a developer can get permission to start a new development even if its previous project has not been completed. I can imagine how frustrating it must be for a homeowner who has been living for years on an unfinished site to watch while the same developer starts work on a new site up the road. In many ways, the loophole has allowed a small number of repeat offenders to continue that practice while giving genuine developers — incidentally, the overwhelming majority — a bad name.

The legislation should be amended to include a clause that states that a house cannot legally be conveyed until the road and all relevant utilities are in place. I welcome the recommendation to adapt property certificates to include a legal opinion on the condition of the roads and sewers and the potential consequences of non-adoption.

I also support the recommendation that councils, in conjunction with NILGA, play a central role in co-ordinating a prioritisation audit of unadopted infrastructure. As a councillor until recently, I am of the view that no organisation is better informed or better placed to carry out such an audit in each respective district. That will be effective only if the necessary legislation, clarity and resources are in place to act on the audit's findings.

I appreciate that the subject of unadopted roads is very emotive and difficult to deal with, bearing in mind the number of agencies and factors involved. I believe that the report is long overdue. I welcome the fact that it is resolution-driven, avoids blame and places the homeowner at the centre of the resolution process.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first business when the House returns will be Question Time. This debate will continue at 3.30 pm, when the next Member called to speak will be Mr Molloy.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.22 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Agriculture and Rural Development

Agriculture: EU Funding Applications

1. **Mrs D Kelly** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the steps that are being taken to regularise the dual claim use on applications under the single farm payment and the less-favoured area compensatory allowances schemes to meet EU requirements. (AQO 3016/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. My Department has been giving consideration to a range of approaches to address concerns that have been raised by EU Commission auditors on our controls governing dual use claims. The particular challenge is to develop a control mechanism that can demonstrate that the conditions of the single farm payment (SFP) and the less-favoured area compensatory allowance (LFACA) schemes are being met simultaneously by each claimant on a single parcel of land. At this stage, my preferred approach is that a written conacre agreement should form the basis of the control mechanism and should be in place between the single farm payment scheme and the LFACA scheme claimant where a dual use claim exists. My intention is that those enhanced controls would not place an unacceptable administrative burden on the Department or on applicants but will meet the Commission's concerns.

I launched a public consultation on that approach in early October, which closed on 9 November. At that time, 19 responses had been received. The majority of the responses supported my preferred approach, and most of the respondents were content with the proposal to use a standard written conacre agreement. I am currently considering all those responses and will announce my decision on the preferred way forward very soon.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the simplification around audit control. However, can the Minister give an undertaking that farmers will not be penalised because of any irregularities that have existed in the system for single farm payments and payments for less-favoured areas?

Mrs O'Neill: I can give the Member that assurance. It is never the Department's intention to make life difficult for farmers. In a lot of these cases and in this instance, Europe dictates what it will accept from us, so it is important that we have proper controls in place. As I said, my preferred approach would be the most simple way forward, and I intend to work with the farmers to make sure that we can get those agreements out and they can easily access them, so that they can have something in place that will help us to move forward and avoid any negative comments from Europe.

Mr McAleer: Can the Minister assure us that the written conacre agreements will be as farmer-friendly and as

simplified as possible so as not to add to the bureaucratic burdens that farmers currently experience?

Mrs O'Neill: I can assure the Member that I believe that the requirement to have the written agreement brought into place is the minimum necessary to allow us to separate the claimants for the single farm payment and LFACA schemes on a single land parcel to demonstrate that they meet the respective scheme obligations, individually and collectively. My officials have been working actively with the Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the Ulster Farmers' Union to ensure that any such agreement is as farmer-friendly as possible but is also fit for purpose and acceptable to the Commission as a proper control mechanism.

Mr Kinahan: Will the Minister give us her assessment of the potential impact of the reclassification of less-favoured areas on future dual use claims?

Mrs O'Neill: The reclassifications are not relevant to this claim. That is a process that has been started in Europe. The Commission's thinking is that that will be separated from the CAP reform negotiations, so it is being put further down the line until perhaps 2014-15. There is a menu of options that may be applied in respect of all the changes that the Commission has proposed, but we want to make sure that we protect areas that are disadvantaged and that the proper support goes to those people. As the process develops further down the line, I will make sure that we consult widely with the people who will be impacted by those decisions. However, it seems that they have been put on the long finger, and it may not happen until 2014-15.

Farming: Regulation

2. **Mr Givan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to reduce the regulatory burden on the farming industry. (AQO 3017/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since taking over responsibility for agriculture and rural development, I have highlighted the reduction of the regulatory burden on the agrifood industry as a particular goal of mine to ensure that the amount of administrative work that farming businesses have to cope with is reduced as far as possible. The key aim has always been to ensure that the balance between regulation and simplification creates an environment that allows businesses to grow further and our rural communities to flourish.

My officials are currently taking forward the third year of the Department's current three-year better regulation action plan. The specific key actions in the third year involve my officials working on the development of plans to introduce an electronic identification policy for cattle. The legislation to underpin that is under consideration in Brussels at present and offers the potential to significantly reduce paperwork for farmers. Another key action is the development of remote sensing techniques, which have the potential to reduce the number of on-farm inspections carried out by the Department. Those, together with other initiatives such as a major new project to procure a replacement for the current animal and public health information system (APHIS), will provide further opportunities for us to help farmers to reduce their administrative burden by improving flexibility of access and performance.

You will also be aware that my officials are working with stakeholders on developing the next rural development programme, which will run up to 2020. That presents us all with a tremendous opportunity to contribute ideas for simplification in the new programme and measures at this very early stage in the programme's development.

The industry is well aware of the tight restraints under which we are obliged to regulate and appreciates that the rules safeguard the industry and protect the public. However, I am determined that simplification will be a key theme in the future.

Mr Givan: I thank the Minister for that response. I welcome the work that her Department is taking forward to ensure that the processes are as simplified as possible and only where necessary. The Minister will know that the farming industry often feels aggrieved at the rigidity of the Environment Agency in respect of the role that it plays and how that impacts on the farming industry in terms of the closed period to do with slurry spreading and other areas where it often encounters an inflexible approach and an approach that is not common sense. Can she assure the House that she will continue to represent the concerns of farmers so that the Environment Agency acts reasonably?

Mrs O'Neill: I agree with the Member, particularly in wanting to avoid any situations where you create additional administrative burdens on the farming community. It is always about a balance between having legislative controls and providing freedom for the industry to operate and do what it is doing. I have engaged with DOE on that issue, and we will continue to do that. I have a meeting scheduled with the Environment Minister in the next number of weeks, and that is one of the issues that is on the agenda. So, it will continually be raised. As those issues are raised by farmers, I will make sure that I carry out my role and responsibility by raising them with DOE or any other Department that may come into play in any of these issues.

Mr Byrne: Can the Minister enlighten the House as to whether the LPIS will be on target to be delivered so that it can help farmers in their claims? Will the Minister accept that the random selection of farmers for scrutiny is causing great concern to some of them?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that I updated the House last week on the maps issue and LPIS, and I refer him to that statement. We are still on target according to what I said at that time. It is important that the Department continues to assist farmers to do things better, to make sure that we improve productivity and to make sure that everything is speeded up.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for her replies to that important question. Can the Minister give her Department's specific year-on-year accomplishments during the past three years on reducing the regulatory burden, which, as she knows, is a target for the Programme for Government?

Mrs O'Neill: The Member will be aware that work was taken forward with DARD and DETI looking at the industry in general and how we can improve things. A number of interim targets have been achieved, and there have been ongoing improvements, but not all things have been achieved. The plan will run up to, I think, 2015 before we will expect to see full delivery, but there have been a lot of improvements, particularly over the last number of years around sheep ID. That reduces the burden on farmers to

be able to freely move their sheep. We have improvements in APHIS, we have the synchronising of herd testing and we have the introduction of the computerisation of the agrienvironment scheme. There are four key pieces of work that are definitely working to reduce the burden on farmers, and there is much more work ongoing. I encourage farmers who have very simple ideas about how to improve things to contact us through the website or through DARD Direct offices to give us the practical examples, and we will make sure that we improve things where it is possible to improve them.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Jim Allister for a supplementary.

Mr Allister: Mr Cree stole my thunder, I am afraid.

Common Agricultural Policy

3. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on negotiations on the common agricultural policy reform to maximise the interests of the farming community. (AQO 3018/11-15)

11. **Mr McMullan** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the common agricultural policy reform negotiations. (AQO 3026/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 3 and 11 together.

It is fair to say that progress in the CAP reform post 2013 negotiations has been very slow. One of the main stumbling blocks has been the desire to secure agreement in the negotiations on the EU budget for 2014-2020. The budget negotiations have been difficult, to say the least, given the wide-ranging views on the way forward coming from member states and the Parliament. Members will be aware that discussions between member states on 22 and 23 November broke up without any agreement. It is unlikely that any real progress will be made on CAP reform until after the budget negotiations conclude. I continue to argue strongly for no further cuts to the CAP budget beyond what the EU Commission has proposed, which is a freeze in nominal terms. That would amount to a substantial reduction in real terms and is harsher treatment for the CAP compared with the EU budget as a whole, even if it were frozen in real terms as some are demanding.

Despite the complication of the EU budget negotiations, discussion on the detail of the proposals for CAP reform continues. I continue to do all that I can to influence that discussion and represent the interests of our farmers and rural communities. I suggested a number of amendments to the CAP reform proposals. I am grateful to our MEPs for putting those forward. Around 7,500 amendments were proposed by MEPs. They are being consolidated into a more manageable number prior to the Parliament completing its First Reading, which is now scheduled for March 2013. With regard to the EU Council discussions, the presidency has tabled revised texts that could be described as a step in the right direction on some issues. However, it is clear from the reaction of member states that many aspects remain unresolved.

I have now met the Commission on a number of occasions and taken the opportunity to push hard for change on key issues, such as moving to a flat rate and greening. Apart from the Commission, I have been engaging directly

with DEFRA Ministers and my devolved Administration colleagues on the reform proposals, as well as with Minister Simon Coveney in the South. I also continue to have regular discussions on CAP reform with our local MEPs. My officials are very closely involved with DEFRA and devolved Administration counterparts in feeding into the Brussels working groups. They also keep in regular contact with our officials in Dublin.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, will you clarify that you are grouping questions 3 and 11?

Mrs O'Neill: Yes.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answer. Has she had any direct discussions, negotiations or dialogue with the Minister for Agriculture in Dublin, Simon Coveney, or the appropriate Ministers in Cardiff, Edinburgh or DEFRA in London? I am talking about ministerial rather than official level.

Mrs O'Neill: I think that I answered that question in my main answer. I have had ongoing discussions. Last Thursday, I had discussions with DEFRA, the Scottish Minister and the Welsh Minister. The previous week, I met Simon Coveney to discuss CAP issues. I have ongoing discussions with all those people. It is important that we also continue to engage with our MEPs because we have co-decision-making in Europe now. That means that our MEPs play a key role in the discussions that go through the Parliament.

I continue to use every avenue that is open to me and knock on every door that I can to ensure that our views are reflected in the ongoing discussions. It is important that we continue to do that in the time ahead. It is unfortunate that we did not agree the financial framework last week because that holds up the negotiation of all the details. The next six months will be crucial.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Oliver McMullan. I am sorry, Mr McMullan. Your question 11 is grouped with question 3. Therefore, you are now entitled to ask a question.

Mr McMullan: Go ahead.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Chris Hazzard.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Has the Minister any idea of when CAP reform will be agreed?

Mrs O'Neill: As I said, it is not possible to be definitive at this stage. Given the failure to agree the financial framework, it will be difficult to gauge how we will move forward. The earliest that we may be able to see a financial agreement, if that is possible, will be February. That will make the timescale very tight for the South of Ireland to deliver in its presidency before the end of June. I know that they are anxious to do that. A lot of the detail could be worked through quickly if we were able to get the financial framework. However, in its absence, it is difficult to iron out all the other issues because you do not know what money you are dealing with.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mrs Jo-Anne Dobson.

Mrs Dobson: My question has been answered.

2.15 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: I call Mr William Irwin.

Mr Irwin: Moving to a flat-rate payment will disadvantage many farmers in Northern Ireland who produce a lot of food but own very little land. Does the Minister agree that Northern Ireland needs a degree of flexibility to address that?

Mrs O'Neill: The three core components of the argument around CAP reform are an adequate budget, flexibility and simplification. That will be key as we move forward.

We carried out a lot of analysis on the flat rate, which showed that the flat rate will favour farms that, under the old regime, were lightly stocked and claimed relatively little direct support. The key issue for us is that, although the Commission has put an offer on the table of five years to allow for the transition, we have argued very strongly that we need a 10-year transition period to allow farmers to adapt to the changing situation. That is gathering a lot of support across Europe, and we hope to achieve some movement on it in the time ahead. What the Commission has proposed is much too severe. It is not gradual, and you cannot expect farmers to adapt to that kind of change overnight.

Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework

4. Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline progress on her tackling rural poverty and rural isolation strategy, which includes the rural challenge fund. (AQO 3019/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I am very pleased with the progress achieved by the tackling rural poverty and social isolation framework, which is on course to meet its specific Programme for Government target, including spend of £4 million in this financial year.

A range of initiatives under the framework is currently under way, all of which provide valuable assistance in addressing rural poverty and isolation. They include the assisted rural travel scheme; support for the Rural Support charity; support for rural community development work; the maximising access in rural areas (MARA) project; the farm family health checks; the connecting elderly rural isolated project; the rural borewells scheme; a youth employability programme and a young entrepreneurs project; and fuel poverty energy efficiency work.

The rural challenge programme opened a call for applications in September. It included a mandatory requirement for potential applicants to attend a best practice workshop to assist with the identification and evidencing of their local poverty and isolation needs. All 13 workshops in the North have been completed, with over 400 community and voluntary groups having attended. That is very encouraging in itself and is a ringing endorsement of the need for such interventions in rural communities and of the role played by volunteers who want to improve the community in which they live. The closing date for receipt of applications is 14 December, and I expect that we will achieve a high number of applications.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answer. What is the programme budget and the timeline for delivery?

Mrs O'Neill: As set out in the business case, the budget for the rural challenge programme is £700,000. It is

envisaged that, through the programme, 70 projects will be funded. Ideally, that would mean funding 10 projects from each of the identified target beneficiary groupings. However, as the minimum grant is £2,000 and the maximum £10,000, it may be possible to fund more than 70 projects, as it is unlikely that all applicants will request the maximum grant.

The programme opened for applications on 14 September, and adverts were placed in the three main papers. Applicants have had three months to consider the needs of their area, identify the appropriate solution and submit an application. That, absolutely, is the beauty of the project. It is about an idea that has grown in a local area and suits the needs of that rural community. It is not about the Department telling an area to suit its priorities. To me, that is the success of the programme and why we have been so oversubscribed with applications.

The deadline for submission of applications is 14 December. I hope that applications will be assessed for their eligibility and scored in January and February, with letters of offer to successful applicants scheduled to be issued in March next year. They will then have 21 months from that date to deliver their project and a further three months to draw down any grant aid and submit a final project evaluation. I am quite excited by the project, and I hope that the applications are beneficial for rural communities.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her responses so far. Will the Minister give the House details of all the administration costs associated with the rural challenge fund to date?

Mrs O'Neill: I do not have a figure. That programme is run by the rural development end of the Department, and a group of people are consistently working on it. There is no additional cost in that respect. I am happy to provide the Member with the detail of the breakdown of the admin costs, if I can get it.

The beauty of the programme and the entire tackling poverty and social isolation project is that £16 million will be invested in rural communities, and that £16 million will be used for all the various projects to lever in additional funding from the other Departments. So, I am not concerned about the administration costs in this regard, but I am happy to provide the Member with a breakdown.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that they must continue to rise in their place otherwise they will not be called.

Mr Rogers: I thank the Minister for her responses thus far. What discussions has her Department had with DRD to continue to prioritise community transport for rural dwellers?

Mrs O'Neill: I am happy to provide the Member with more detail, but I can say that we continue to work with DRD on rural transport. As you are aware, access to public transport in some rural areas is sparse, to say the least, so I will continue to fund that. I do not have the exact figure but am happy to provide that to the Member by letter after Question Time. Transport is a priority area for me in tackling the inaccessibility and the inequality that exists in access to public transport.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. What role does she see for a robust shared future strategy for increasing cohesion in rural communities?

Mrs O'Neill: We all welcome and look forward to the cohesion and integration strategy. All the work that is ongoing in the tackling poverty and social isolation framework looks at the needs of rural communities as a whole; it is not broken down into nationalist or unionist backgrounds. It is about how we look at and address the needs of rural communities. Those are the same for everybody. It is all about tackling inequality, isolation and poverty, regardless of anybody's background.

Ash Dieback Disease

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline what discussions she has had with local councils in relation to ash dieback disease. (AQO 3020/11-15)

7. **Ms Lo** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the position regarding the spread of *Chalara fraxinea* in ash trees. (AQO 3022/11-15)

8. **Mr McClarty** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether the identified cause of ash dieback disease is the only source. (AQO 3023/11-15)

9. **Mr G Robinson** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many cases of ash dieback (*Chalara fraxinea*) there are on Forest Service land. (AQO 3024/11-15)

12. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on ash dieback disease. (AQO 3027/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will answer questions 5, 7, 8, 9 and 12 together.

Our strategy for dealing with the disease requires the surveillance of likely sources of infection and the detection and eradication of diseased trees. Some councils have landfill facilities and have made them available for the deep burial of trees that need to be destroyed. One council has been directly involved because infected trees were found in a recent planting on its land. The council officers are working very closely with DARD inspectors to protect the site and destroy the trees. The chief executive of Forest Service is contacting council chief executives as and when infected trees are found in that council area to advise them of the finding, brief them on the actions that need to be taken and to offer basic biosecurity advice. Council biodiversity officers and recreation officers also play an important part in monitoring trees in council areas and alerting the Department when they are concerned about diseased trees.

In terms of the current spread of the disease, I can advise that the position at 10.00 am today was that there have been 16 confirmed outbreaks at recently planted sites and two in trade where material was found before distribution to sites. The confirmed outbreaks at recently planted sites are in Counties Antrim, Down, Derry and Tyrone. Notices are being served, with the destruction of some 8,700 plants to date. Again, as of 10.00 am today, there were four separate sources, two of which were planted out, all linked to imports from continental Europe. I can confirm that, to date, no cases have been found on Forest Service land.

This disease has a very high priority in the work of my Department, and considerable resources are being allocated using our trade knowledge to trace the movements of plant material from suspected sources to planting sites. We are giving that the greatest priority. In addition, we have surveillance under way targeting about 1,000 sites and are focusing on sites planted over the past five years. Our strategy going forward to eradicate the disease will depend on the outcome of that surveillance and the developing scientific advice.

Information about the disease symptoms is available on the DARD website to assist landowners with their inspection and the recognition of the disease. A telephone helpline number for reporting suspect sites is also available on the website.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Minister, your time is up.

Mrs O'Neill: I take this opportunity to encourage all stakeholders to be vigilant and report all signs to the Department.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, the diamond jubilee wood in east Antrim was established last year with the planting out of some 60,000 trees. It was done in conjunction with a departmental forestry grant, and part of the condition of the grant was that 22,000 to 23,000 ash trees had to be planted. Knowing that the disease was present in Europe for a number of years, was it or is it good practice to insist on such a high percentage of single species tree in any project as a condition?

Mrs O'Neill: I cannot speak about the individual case, but I can confirm that this strain of the disease is very different from what we have seen in Europe, which is why there are particular problems in identifying effective treatment and actions. The science is not there because this is a relatively new disease, only found in England since 2011. We are working our way through that and trying to develop the science and the effective treatments as we move forward. At this stage, it is about taking out the new plants and making sure that we target the new plants so that it never gets into the older plants. The condition, as I said, is not because there was inaction: this is a very different strain of ash disease.

Ms Lo: As the Minister said, England discovered this last year. Has the Minister engaged with the parts of England that were affected about best practice and what they have been doing to address the problem?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that it is my priority to make sure that we eradicate the disease. That is very much the stage that we are still at. We are very much involved in surveillance and research. We will look to everybody, particularly to England because of the position that they are in. We also look towards the South of Ireland. We have very much employed the fortress Ireland approach when it comes to keeping the disease out of Ireland. That is all important work. It is important that we engage, particularly as we develop the science. We do not want to reinvent the wheel: if someone else has found a way to deal with the disease, we will obviously also use that method. We are working with DEFRA and DAFF in the South.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. What steps is she taking to ensure that the four sources

identified for the disease in Northern Ireland are the only sources?

Mrs O'Neill: I assure the Member that we are currently surveying. As I said, we want to survey about 1,000 sites in which we want to make sure that there are no symptoms present. At the moment, I think that we have been to over 200 sites. There is a trade trace, if you like, so we can trace anything that has been imported from potential sites or the sites where cases have been detected. We are very much tracing that whole movement. Officials are working through that process. We have diverted a lot of staff to make sure that they are out on the ground, doing the inspections and getting us as much information as possible. The priority at the moment has to be around surveillance, research and eradication. I am very much committed to making sure that we eradicate the disease.

The Department is also involved in practical support to assist people to remove trees that need to be removed very speedily. We do not want things sitting around if there is the potential for disease. A lot of work is going on.

I use this opportunity to appeal to people to be very vigilant and report symptoms. If you are in any doubt, please contact us and ask for information. We will continue to work with our partners, particularly councils that have access to parks and Forest Service. It is important that people are very vigilant about their biosecurity.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I discourage the private conversations that are taking place on both sides of the House while the Minister is answering questions.

Mr G Robinson: Will the Minister state whether her Department will replace trees that are lost to ash dieback with indigenous species to maintain Northern Ireland's natural woodland habitats as much as possible?

Mrs O'Neill: I missed the start of the Member's contribution, but I think that he asked me whether I was planning to replace trees. As I said, the focus at the moment is certainly on eradication. I have asked Forest Service to look at the potential implications further down the line, such as, for example, for someone who received their woodland grant scheme and then had to remove trees. We are working on that, but the focus at the moment is very much on making sure that we eradicate the disease. We do not want it to be an even bigger problem down the line. We want to avoid any instances in which people have to come to us for compensation. I assure the Member that we are still on target to pay our woodland premium scheme in December and for the forestry agrienvironment scheme. There is no delay in any of that because of what is going on.

Culture, Arts and Leisure

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 4 has been withdrawn and a written answer is required.

World Police and Fire Games

1. **Mrs McKeivitt** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she is taking to ensure a lasting legacy from the 2013 World Police and Fire Games. (AQO 3029/11-15)

3. **Mr D McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on her Department's plans to ensure that there is a lasting legacy following the World Police and Fire Games 2013. (AQO 3031/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I thank the Member for her question. With your permission, a LeasCheann Comhairle, I will take questions 1 and 3 together.

The World Police and Fire Games in 2013 must deliver a lasting legacy. The games provide an opportunity to build strong links between the services and the communities that they serve. The volunteer programme's main recruitment phase closed with over 6,000 people pledging support. The focus has now moved to encouraging under-represented groups, including people with disabilities, older people and people from neighbourhood renewal areas to volunteer during the games, and hopefully beyond.

2.30 pm

Mrs McKeivitt: The possibility has been raised that accommodation might cause some difficulty in the delivery of the games. I welcome the information roadshows on that, which are beginning this week. Does the Minister think that any lessons could be taken from the efforts to create a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games and applied to the World Police and Fire Games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. There are lots of lessons we can learn, particularly from the more positive aspects. Young ambassadors were involved in the Olympics and Paralympics, as well as the games makers or volunteers from both games. We hope to transfer that to the World Police and Fire Games. We will look at the role of charities and under-represented communities, as well as at accommodation, which is going to be a big challenge. What ideas did the city of London employ that we can perhaps learn from? I am confident that the company is currently looking at all those things, not just on its own but with the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL), Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, (DETI) and the Tourist Board, to see how it can make sure we meet that challenge in the best way possible. There are lots of positive things we can do that will leave a lasting legacy from 2013.

Mr D McIlveen: Minister, will you tell me whether you plan to give any support to businesses that have been successful in securing bids? I am thinking of the example of Carnview Farms in Ballymena, which is hosting the shooting event. It is going to have to invest a significant amount of money in facilities just to bring the venue up to standard for the games. Will your Department be offering any financial support to them?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As part of the overall funding package, Sport NI is looking at what additional support it can give. I assume, although I have not yet received a report, that it will be looking at venues, particularly those outside Belfast. Belfast City Council is looking at venues in Belfast in conjunction with DCAL. I will ask Sport NI, particularly after your question, what it is doing to help areas outside Belfast to achieve the best standard possible. I do know that, as part of the selection criteria to become a host venue outside Belfast, a lot of scrutiny, reviewing and monitoring went on. All venues met the required standard

or above, so I am confident that, whatever support is needed, it is not going to be a huge amount of money. I will certainly look at that to see how we can deliver a better product overall.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister outline the main challenges in staging a successful World Police and Fire Games? Has she had discussions with her Executive colleagues about the question of accommodation for spectators and visitors?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Myself and Minister Foster, through our officials and Departments, are working on accommodation and the tourism product. I think that we need to look at the overall position of where we are with enhancing the opportunities for the World Police and Fire Games. Certainly, incidents such as what happened in Belfast last night absolutely do not add to the logo of "the friendliest games ever", particularly when 15 police officers were injured as a result of the trouble. Collectively, we have been looking at areas like accommodation, businesses and communities. We have been working with Belfast City Council to try to make sure that we give as much support as possible.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister look forward to welcoming a royal personality to the opening of the games? Has such an invitation been issued?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not received any such invitation.

Stadia Development

2. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the developmental stages of the three stadia. (AQO 3030/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. There has been considerable activity, particularly over the past six months, in relation to the development stages of the three stadia. Under close guidance of DCAL officials, the governing bodies of all three sports have been able to establish the necessary frameworks and processes and arrangements and delivery mechanisms that are essential to making timely and significant progress on each of the stadia projects. Social clauses have been put in place for the rugby construction contract, and are being developed for GAA and IFA construction contracts, to ensure that opportunities exist for the long-term unemployed, apprenticeships and student placements.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for her answer, in which she partially addressed my follow-up. I am concerned that long-term unemployed and young people in particular are given opportunities during the construction phase of the three stadia. Will she indicate whether that is part of the specification for the contracts and procurement?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can give that comfort to the Member. For a long time, we have been hearing about the long-term unemployed, and there have been different definitions of it. But I assure the Member that I am talking about "long term" meaning 12 months and beyond for the purpose of the social clauses that are included in the procurement tender and the contract documentation. For example, in the Ravenhill contract, we are looking at employing seven long-term unemployed; creating four new apprenticeships; having 5% of the workforce in recognised apprenticeships schemes; having two student placements; and producing

five practical post-contract proposals that will develop a range of social returns for that area.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. She may be aware that representatives of the three sports gave evidence to the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee last week. In relation to Windsor Park — home of the green and white army — is the council and her Department working together closely on a collaborative approach to the Olympia leisure centre and the new Windsor Park, to provide value for money for both ratepayers and taxpayers?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am due to meet Belfast City Council and my officials in January to talk about other issues, including what those new proposals look like and how far they are developed. The Member is 100% right: we need to make sure that we get value for money, particularly for ratepayers and taxpayers. I remember answering that question from your colleague, I think that it was Jimmy Spratt, by saying that it does not make sense for one Department to develop opportunities only for another Department — or in this case local government — to come along afterwards and miss out on opportunities when we can deliver a better product, which I believe that the people of south Belfast deserve.

Mr McDevitt: Councillor Humphrey may want to declare an interest the next time that he asks a question about Belfast City Council. However, is the Minister satisfied that the development at Ravenhill rugby ground will definitely be completed by the summer of 2014?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am absolutely determined that it will be delivered by 2014. In the past six months, I have been persistent and consistent with each of the three sporting bodies, and we have worked very closely to ensure that those targets are met. We met as recently as last week and will meet again next week, before Christmas comes and we go into a new year. Work has already started, as planned, at Ravenhill. So, everything is on schedule, and I am delighted that that is the case.

Mr McGimpsey: Will the Department support the IFA's ambition to have a museum for football in the Windsor Park complex, bearing in mind the huge legacy that we have in this country? With the world's fourth oldest association and third oldest football league, we have a legacy and a story to tell. Therefore, it is important that the Department indicates its support, at this stage, for such a development.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I have to be honest: the first time that I heard about this was on the radio the other morning, and I just caught the tail end of what Jim Gracey said. I think that sport is needed but missing from within our museum family. We have a huge narrative and proud history in all sports, and that is not reflected by what is in our museums. The museum at Croke Park is a tourist attraction that brings people into the stadium and adds to the economy. It also gives a sense of history reflecting the sport which, I believe, is missing here at the minute. So, I am waiting to hear what those proposals are. I would welcome sport being better recognised by museums. It is down to the IFA and whatever it decides to propose. As long as the stands are built and the Department's requirements are met, anything additional is entirely down to the IFA. I will support its decision.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Question 3 has been dealt with and question 4 has been withdrawn.

Ulster-Scots Agency

5. **Mr Lunn** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her Department has measured the value for money delivered by the Ulster-Scots Agency between 2008-09 and 2010-11. (AQO 3033/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. A number of corporate governance arrangements are in place by which the sponsor Departments ensure that value for money is delivered by the agency. Those include progress reports from the chair and the CEO to Ministers at the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) language body meetings; progress reports by the CEO at quarterly accountability meetings; NSMC language body meetings attended by officials from the sponsor Departments; attendance at the agency's audit and risk committee as observers; multi-report arrangements to both sponsor Departments on issues such as internal audit and fraud returns; and progress towards completing outstanding accounts and audit recommendations. The agency also prepares business cases for all proposed expenditure, and when those are above the CEO's delegated limit, they must be submitted to the sponsor Departments for consideration and approval. When projects are completed, post-project evaluations are undertaken, and samples of those are examined by my officials.

Mr Lunn: I thank the Minister for her answer. When can we expect full publication of the agency's accounts? Will they include a full assessment of the value-for-money aspect of its funding arrangements under the heading that she has just given us?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I had been anticipating that the accounts would be laid before the Assembly by December 2013, and it is with disappointment that I learn that it is not going to happen this year — *[Interruption.]* — sorry, 2012. They will not be laid now until 2013. Minister Deenihan and I received a report from the chairs of both agencies and their chief executives to say that that would happen, but unfortunately it is not going to happen. We have an NSMC language body meeting next week, and the issue will be raised again. The Member has asked that question previously and will persist until he gets the answer that he wants. I will ensure that that happens.

Mr Anderson: How does the Minister's Department measure value for money for Foras na Gaeilge?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The question is not appropriate to Ulster Scots. We will, therefore, move on. I call Mr Oliver McMullan. The question has to be on Ulster Scots.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister tell us the current position with the 2009-2010 annual accounts?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Member has probably just heard the response to Mr Lunn's question. The same question keeps coming up time and time again. Without fear of repeating myself, I will just say that I am disappointed that the assurances that Jimmy Deenihan, Dinny McGinley and I sought on the issue have not been realised. The latest update states that the 2009 accounts were signed off by the chairs and the chief executives on 7 November. The process is that the accounts were then certified by

the C&AG on 26 November. The aim was to have those accounts laid before the Assembly in December 2012, as I stated to Mr Lunn, but they will not be laid and will be brought early in the new year. We will write again to the joint chairs of the language bodies requesting confirmation of when the 2010 accounts will be ready. As I said to Mr Lunn, I have no doubt that we will raise the issue at our next sectoral meeting, which is next Wednesday.

Mr Nesbitt: What is the Minister's assessment of the agency's strategy in promoting Ulster-Scots culture?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I was privileged to be at the launch of the flagship schools programme. That is a fresh, new initiative that not only works with groups of adults in the community but looks at how Ulster-Scots culture and heritage could be added to the school curriculum. The flagship schools programme is one example of how the Ulster-Scots community is trying its best to promote what it has to offer, outside what it normally does, and what it hopes to achieve.

2.45 pm

World Police and Fire Games

6. **Mr Girvan** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the World Police and Fire Games 2013. (AQO 3034/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I am sure that he was here when I answered questions 1 and 3. By way of an update and to reassure him, I recently met members of the board, and I believe that significant progress has been made in preparation for the World Police and Fire Games next year.

I will give the Member some examples. The games opened for registration on 1 November and already over 1,000 athletes have signed up and paid their registration fee, so that is good news. The company has received almost 6,500 applications from people who wish to volunteer during the games. That figure exceeds the target of over 4,000, and the Member will agree that that is very good news.

Already, almost 5,000 bed spaces have been booked through the Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau. For us, that represents a value of over £1.7 million to the economy, which again is good news. The venues for the 57 sports across the North have also been announced. I believe that the milestones that we were hoping to achieve when I last met the board have been reached. That is very good progress to report.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Minister for her answer. Has any contact been made with the University of Ulster about accommodation in the halls of residence, which I understand will be vacant at that time?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As I said in a previous answer, work is ongoing with officials from DETI, my Department and the Tourist Board, not just with the university but with other bodies. We have heard about concepts such as pop-up hotels and using halls of residence for accommodation.

We are now, unfortunately, in a situation in which there is lots of empty office space and apartment blocks, but we are actively pursuing those options. Accommodation will be a big challenge, given the numbers that I outlined. If that continues to progress, it is not a bad thing. It is a

good thing in one way, but obviously it presents us with a different challenge.

All those novel ideas are currently being pursued. If the Member or anyone else has other ideas about how we might add to those, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and I look forward to hearing them.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as na freagraí a thug sí dúinn inniu. I thank the Minister for her answers. She has told us that 1,000 athletes have already registered for the World Police and Fire Games. Is she confident that the required figure of some 12,000 to 15,000 will be registered in time for the start of the games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I hope that that will be the case. The benchmarks that we have set thus far have been achieved, so that will be a sign of confidence, but I appreciate that it is early days.

We are in a good situation compared with the games that took place in New York last year. We have a smaller place here, but we have a lot more to offer. We also have a cultural package that will be wrapped around the games and will make them a far more attractive option. So far, we are on target, but we need to review things early next year. I hope to have further meetings with the World Police and Fire Games company to receive that assurance.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for her answers thus far. Will she ensure that her Department works closely with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to market us worldwide and maximise the potential of the 2013 games?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I can give the Member that assurance. We have a big year to look ahead to next year, and the World Police and Fire Games are a part of that. A range of promotional materials is being used to attract additional tourists here, but, as well as that, we will have the City of Culture in Derry and the World Police and Fire Games in Belfast. We are looking at events to include Féile an Phobail in west Belfast, "The Gathering", Ceol na hÉireann and all the other options that are already there. It is about how we join those up and give people a bit more choice and, certainly, better value for money.

Sports Clubs: East Belfast

7. **Mr Newton** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure which sports clubs in the East Belfast constituency have applied for funding from her Department in the past 12 months. (AQO 3035/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Sport NI is responsible for the distribution of Exchequer funding to sport in the North, and it has advised me that no clubs in the East Belfast constituency have applied for funding in the past 12 months. Prior to that, between 2009 and 2011, Sport NI provided over £1.8 million of Exchequer and lottery funding to support sport and development in the East Belfast area. Furthermore, between 2009 and 2013, Sport NI has awarded Belfast City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council almost £3 million of lottery funding through the Active Communities programme to encourage greater participation in sport in areas including East Belfast.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I have to say that that answer will come as a great shock;

that, indeed, in the past 12 months not one single penny of DCAL money has gone into the East Belfast constituency. It is a very large constituency with a large number of sports clubs actively pursuing their sports in the area. One can only question why that sudden drop-off has taken place over the past 12 months. What does the Minister intend to do to reactivate the level of funding?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think you have got a question there.

Ms Ní Chuilín: Maybe the Member did not hear the beginning of the answer, so I will repeat it. No clubs in the East Belfast constituency have applied for funding in the past 12 months. I want it on record that I resent the implication that, in the past 12 months, because I am in the Department, there has been some sort of dip in sports provision in East Belfast. I would like the Member to clarify that position. I am happy to meet him and groups from East Belfast to hear about their sporting needs, but I will not tolerate people making inferences that groups did not receive funding. Groups did not apply for funding.

Mr Copeland: Has the Minister taken any steps to meet officials from Glentoran Football Club in order to assess what assistance the Department may be able to offer due to the financial hardship they are facing?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not had any request to meet Glentoran Football Club. I am not initiating any meetings with Glentoran Football Club, because I firmly believe, in the first instance, that it is a matter for Glentoran and the IFA. However, I understand the position that the players are in, particularly in the mouth of Christmas. I assure the Member that I have not received any requests for meetings.

Arts and Culture: Child Protection

8. **Miss M McIlveen** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she is taking to extend the work of the child protection in sport unit to the arts and culture sectors. (AQO 3036/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. The child protection in sport unit was established in 2011 between Sport NI and the NSPCC. It is recognised and accepted as the source of expert safeguarding advice and support by the sports sector.

Consistent and comprehensive standards have been established and agreed for safeguarding children in sport. The attainment of these standards is a funding requirement for all recognised sports governing bodies and affiliated clubs. A network of trained designated safeguarding children's officers has been established within governing bodies such as the IFA, rugby and the GAA. These officers help to ensure that core child protection requirements are applied consistently across sports and that safeguarding procedures are embedded and implemented into sport at grass-roots levels.

Miss M McIlveen: Given the high priority of child protection and the status it is being given currently, would the Minister agree that it would be useful to collate information centrally on safeguarding issues and child protection referrals relating to DCAL's areas of responsibility?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Yes, I would agree. At the end of the day, the onus is not just on sport, it is on the whole DCAL family. I am keen to hear suggestions about anything

that we can do to enhance the protection of children and vulnerable adults. That is the priority. There is no grey area here. I am more than willing to hear what the Member, or anyone else, can advise on anything that we can do to enhance that.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. Does she accept that the Sandy Row Amateur Boxing Club performed the necessary requirements as regards Access Northern Ireland and that this has been verified by the NSPCC? Does she therefore agree that the moves by the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) to disaffiliate the club are not valid?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I am not aware that the IABA disaffiliated Sandy Row boxing club; that is not the case. I cannot confirm any reports about child protection vetting at the Sandy Row boxing club. I would not even see those anyway. Sandy Row boxing club will receive funding based on its affiliation. Within that, there is a requirement around governance, and child protection is essential. Any reluctance to have that done would raise a lot of questions.

Creative Industries: NEETs

9. **Mr Rogers** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the creative industries sector, in particular television and film production, can help in reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training. (AQO 3037/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. The creative industries include areas such as music, designer fashion, craft, and television and film production. This vibrant sector harnesses our renowned creative and cultural strengths and enables individuals and companies to compete and succeed on the world stage, but we must ensure that our efforts to support the creative industries include providing opportunities for all. Young people not in education, employment or training are not bereft of creativity, talent or potential. The creative and cultural infrastructure programmes and organisations funded and supported by my Department provide opportunities to stimulate and nurture creative talent, self-belief and, hopefully, aspiration.

Mr Rogers: Thanks, Minister, for your response. Have you had discussions with the Department for Employment and Learning about how the creative industries fit into the success strategy?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have not had any discussions with the Minister for Employment and Learning, but I understand officials are working together. When I spoke recently to some groups from creative industries, particularly those involved in television and film production and fashion and design, one of the things that they raised constantly was the need to perhaps amend the further and higher education curriculum to meet the needs of the sector. That is a decision that the Minister for Employment and Learning needs to take. I am happy to try to bring that forward, because we need to try to make it easy for children and young people who are not in training, education or employment to access this rather than to keep the impediments that are there.

Lough Neagh Working Group

10. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what input her Department has had to the Lough Neagh working group. (AQO 3038/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I nominated a senior official at grade 5 level to represent my Department as a member of the Lough Neagh working group. There have been four meetings of the working group, all of which have been attended by a DCAL official. My officials have supplied information and briefings about DCAL's involvement in Lough Neagh, as required by the working group.

My officials were in direct contact with 14 organisations, with whom my Department has dealings, to take note of their opinions about the ownership of Lough Neagh. Their views and written comments have been collated with information gathered by other Departments and will be taken into account for the report that is due to be given to the Executive.

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat. I thank the Minister for her reply. This is a very important issue that we have been raising here for some time. What input can the public have to the working group? When are we likely to get the working group's final report?

Ms Ní Chuilín: As the Member knows, this is being taken forward by the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development. However, if there are any concerns about delays in the report going forward, I can assure the Member that my officials will do everything that they can to ensure that written requests for information are forwarded to the working group. There will be no delay from my Department.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister outline what impact the ongoing work of the Lough Neagh working group will have on the eel fishery?

Ms Ní Chuilín: Unfortunately, time is running out. I am happy to write to the Member with a bit more detail. It is key that local people who fish and are guardians of those rivers and lakes, and this lough in particular, have expert information and know exactly what is needed. I am open to listening to them. My officials will listen to their plans for the way forward in eel fishing. Local people need to ensure that the lough provides them with a living.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members will take their ease for a minute or two.

3.00 pm

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Mr Deputy Speaker: Patsy McGlone is not in his place to ask question 1.

Parliament Buildings: Irish-medium Schools

2. **Mr McAleer** asked the Assembly Commission how many Irish-medium schools have visited Parliament Buildings in the current mandate. (AQO 3044/11-15)

Mr McElduff: I thank my colleague the Member for West Tyrone for asking how many Irish-medium schools have

visited Parliament Buildings in the current mandate. Since May 2011, the Assembly Education Service has delivered the education programme to 10 groups of students from five Irish-medium schools, including Coláiste Feirste just yesterday.

The five schools that have visited are: Bunscoil Bheann Mhadagáin from north Belfast, which took part in an education programme in June; Coláiste Cois Life from Dublin, which took part in an education programme on 8 May; Coláiste Feirste from west Belfast took part in six education programmes, including one yesterday, as I said; Gaelcholáiste na Mara from Wicklow, which took part in an education programme in April; and Gaelscoil na Speiríní, which took part in an education programme in March.

Mr McAleer: I thank my colleague from West Tyrone for that comprehensive answer. Have the education officers received training in the Irish language?

Mr McElduff: Again, I thank Mr McAleer for his question. Go raibh maith agat as an cheist a chuir tú. One of the education officers in the team is studying for a qualification in the Irish language. Students from Irish-medium schools can receive a programme that is delivered mainly in Irish. Students from Irish-medium schools also get the opportunity to have a question-and-answer session with MLAs who are Irish speakers. The education team does its utmost to seek out the Gaelic speakers among the complement of MLAs.

Mr Gardiner: How are schools advised by the Education Service about its programmes?

Mr McElduff: The Assembly Education Service provides programmes and resources to support young people in developing their understanding of the Assembly and to encourage their participation in the democratic process. All schools receive a letter and information about current programmes at the start of the academic year and are encouraged to take part, and our in-house and outreach programmes are well advertised on our website.

Mr McCrea: Having heard Members opposite talk about how unwelcoming this place is to people from the Irish tradition, does the member of the Commission not welcome the fact that people from the Irish-medium sector feel comfortable coming to this Building?

Mr McElduff: I thank Mr McCrea for his question. Yes, obviously this is work in progress, and Irish-medium schools that visit Parliament Buildings at Stormont provide very positive feedback. That is down, not least, to the excellent service delivered by our Education Service, which I commend.

Youth Assembly

3. **Mr Lyttle** asked the Assembly Commission for an update on the Youth Assembly. (AQO 3045/11-15)

Mr Weir: I thank Mr Lyttle for his question. Initial proposals for the development of a youth assembly were presented to stakeholders in October 2009. Following consultation with stakeholders, a youth-led approach to developing proposals for a youth assembly was strongly advocated and endorsed by the Assembly Commission. As a result, a youth panel was recruited to develop the proposals for a youth assembly. The youth panel, which comprised 30 young people aged between 16 and 18, developed

the proposals between March 2010 and February 2011, and subsequently presented draft proposals to the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister's junior Ministers and the Minister of Education in March 2011. The proposals were then presented to the Assembly Commission, which approved, in principle, the establishment of a youth assembly. A public consultation took place from May to September 2011. The consultation responses overwhelmingly supported the youth panel's proposal to establish a youth assembly.

In the intervening period since September 2011, the consultation responses have been considered, the youth panel has been given direction on some emerging issues and the resultant report has been drafted. Furthermore, a significant amount of work has been done in developing the recruitment plans for the youth assembly as part of the inclusion and cost considerations. As a result of those deliberations, a proposal is being drafted for the Assembly Commission with a recommendation for a two-year pilot youth assembly. However, it must be noted that the imperative to establish a robust and fitting youth assembly must be measured against the resources available to deliver such an enterprise, and it is expected that that will be central to the Commission's decision for the future of the youth assembly.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his response. How important does he think the youth assembly will be in engaging with disaffected young people at this time, not least given the complete lack of leadership that is shown by many people in here on a number of issues?

Mr Weir: The Member is being very critical of himself and fellow MLAs. I do not share that opinion.

Youth engagement is an important element, and whether it is with disaffected youth or, indeed, young people in general, a positive role can be developed. Developing those positive, respectful relationships can promote good relations between young people, can help us to listen to the views of young people in their area and can deal with a range of campaign issues in relation to young people. No one would question the general principle of a youth assembly, but we are trying to judge the practicalities so that we get something that is fit for purpose in difficult financial circumstances. For example, the UK Youth Parliament costs around £1 million a year, and the Scottish Youth Parliament costs £700,000 a year. We have to balance those considerations as well.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Does the commissioner agree that the delay in getting this in place is regrettable? You said that the Scottish Parliament has something similar, and if it can do it, why can we not? When is it likely to be in place?

Mr Weir: It is about trying to ensure that we have adequate resources to cover it. I mentioned the cost of the assemblies, but I forgot to mention that the Welsh Assembly has a similar body. The Welsh are in no way patronising young people by calling it Funky Dragon, and that costs in excess of £500,000. It is important that we do not have something that is simply a paper exercise but is robust and fit for purpose. We must try to balance that against the issue of adequate resources. All of us would like things to have happened quicker, but we have to ensure that we get it right.

Mrs McKeivitt: Are there youth parliaments in any other jurisdictions that we can look at to see best practice?

Mr Weir: There are youth parliaments in the Dáil, Westminster, Scotland and Wales. I am not suggesting that there are important youth parliaments in the Caribbean and that we could send a few Members on a fact-finding mission. A range of things can be looked at —

Mr Kennedy: Who is in Cuba?

Mr Weir: We wonder whether the two Members in Cuba have a one-way ticket or whether they will come back.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We are getting well off the question.

Mr Weir: There are a number of youth parliaments. One of the things that we want to learn, and I have mentioned it in relation to that, is that there has been a considerable cost attached to that. So it is not just a question of learning what others are doing but of learning how we can do things more cost-efficiently. It must also be robust to make it meaningful. There are a number of examples that we can draw from.

Parliament Buildings: Security

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Assembly Commission what security measures will be put in place for people accessing Parliament Buildings via the newly constructed ramps at the front of the Building. (AQO 3046/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the question. The ramps that were installed over the summer are most welcome to disabled groups across Northern Ireland, and the Assembly Commission is determined to ensure that the Building has disabled-friendly aspects attached to everything that we do. The issue of security at the new front ramp was given careful consideration at the outset, and it was subsequently concluded that no additional security measures would be required for all users of that entrance. The search procedures at the front of the Building for such people using it will remain the same as the procedures that are currently used at the east and west entrances.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Member for his reply. I agree with his comments about making the Building as accessible as possible to all. Given that the new ramps are for people with mobility issues, how do people accessing the Building using those ramps and who go through the front door go through the appropriate security measures? If, as often happens, they and those accompanying them are permitted to bypass the security hut and bring their vehicles to the top car park, how do they go through security?

Mr P Ramsey: At present, disabled people who access the Building, either from the east or the west, are searched by a handheld scanner. A similar process will be in place on the new ramp entrance. The Commission is determined to ensure that the Building is totally accessible to everyone in our community, including people who are marginalised and who represent disabled groups. In introducing this exercise, we consulted with a range of disabled groups, including Disability Action, which approved the concept behind it. There will be no difference between the existing search procedures, which have been in place for a number

of years, and the procedures with the new ramps at the front entrance.

Assembly: Irish Language

5. Ms McGahan asked the Assembly Commission what plans it has to reflect the culture and ethos of the Irish language. (AQO 3047/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the question. Draft language guidance has been under consideration by the Assembly Commission, and the views of all parties have been sought. Following discussions at the Assembly Commission meeting on 6 November this year, a number of issues were raised for further consideration, including offering Irish-medium schools the opportunity to have a tour of Parliament Buildings in the Irish language, as my colleague outlined. It was agreed that consideration of the language guidance continue in January next year. Members are asked to note that the Irish language is currently reflected in the Assembly's work, and I will go through some of the areas of that work. Remarks in Irish during plenary sittings are recorded in the Official Report. Correspondence that is received in Irish will be responded to in the same. In Committee meetings, a translation service is available on request. Callers who contact the Assembly indicating that they wish to conduct their business in Irish will be diverted to the Irish-language voicemail, and following translation, referral to a relevant official for action will take place. Multilingual information leaflets, including in Irish, are available.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Can I have an update on the Assembly Commission language policy?

Mr P Ramsey: As I tried to outline in some way to the Member, the Assembly Commission's language policy is still under consideration. We will receive a further report in January next year, but we want to ensure that we progress with consensus.

Parliament Buildings: Flags

6. Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission what progress has been made with adding Ulster Day to the occasions when the Union flag is flown from Parliament Buildings. (AQO 3048/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey: I welcome the question. The arrangements for the flying of the Union flag from government buildings in Northern Ireland are set out by the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000, as amended by the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) 2002.

3.15 pm

The Assembly Commission's policy is to follow those regulations. Under those regulations, the list of designated days, of which the Member is aware, is issued by OFMDFM each year. Generally, they are 15 days in total. That is not decided by the Assembly Commission. Ulster Day, which was referred to in the Member's question, is not one of the designated days.

The issue that the Member raised will be considered at the Assembly Commission meeting next week.

Mr Allister: I ask the member of the Commission to confirm that the Flags (Northern Ireland) Order 2000 does not by law apply to this Building and nor do the designated

days. They apply rather by the choice of the Assembly Commission, which chooses to use them as a template. There is no compulsion on the Commission to do that by law. It is the Commission's choice, so it could change that policy. The Commission has, by its voting measures, a unionist majority when it comes to voting. Is the Commission member telling us that not a single member, including those who went through a process of faux anger about the absence of the flag on Ulster Day, has raised the issue in the Commission?

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that we have a question.

Mr P Ramsey: I think that we have one or two. I can confirm for the Member that the Assembly Commission, at the onset of devolved government in Northern Ireland, decided to adopt the principle as outlined for other public buildings, and we should not be any different. I confirm to him, in picking up his second point, that in my time on the Assembly Commission, I have never received any request to fly the flag on any other day.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I ask Mr Ramsey whether, given the disgraceful scenes outside Belfast City Hall yesterday evening, the Commission has given —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. That is not a relevant question.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Absolutely. Just let me finish. Has the Commission considered establishing either a subcommittee or an Ad Hoc Committee to discuss the whole flags issue, and perhaps give a lead to the rest of the region?

Mr P Ramsey: I agree with the Member. The flags issue is a very emotive and sensitive one. It is one that the Assembly Commission is always mindful of. In those circumstances, the Commission will reflect on and note Members' concerns. We always try to achieve the greatest consensus that we can on any issue, irrespective of how important it is to other Members or whether they view it as a priority.

The members of the Commission are mandated by political parties to represent them, and I am sure that our discussions next week, specifically on a formal request from a Member, may lead to some deliberation and discussion. At present, I believe that leadership is being taken by the Assembly Commission by having 15 designated days. That is consistent with policies for other public buildings across Northern Ireland.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That concludes questions to the Assembly Commission. Members may now take their ease for a moment.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

Committee Business

Unadopted Roads: Committee for Regional Development Report

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Regional Development on its inquiry into unadopted roads in Northern Ireland (NIA 44/11/15); and calls on the Minister for Regional Development, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues and relevant bodies, to implement the recommendations.

Mr Molloy: I welcome the Regional Development Committee report, which highlights the problems of unfinished estates, unadopted roads, sewers, street lights, and so on.

In the previous debate that we held on this subject, I highlighted the plight of an estate in Coalisland, Gortview, which had similar problems. There was never a sewer connected, yet half a dozen houses had been sold. It is hard to believe how a house could be sold and how solicitors and others could sign up a house for sale, including getting a mortgage, without having a sewer connected, but that is the reality. Thankfully, that estate has now been resold to a new developer; it has been progressed and is now connected to a main sewer, and some of the other problems are being dealt with. It is important that we record similar situations right across the country where those types of actions have happened.

Members have mentioned the legal responsibility of solicitors when they sign up a person who is buying a house and the protection that the buyer expects to have in that situation. Hopefully, the Law Society and others will ensure that solicitors make sure that that happens when those arrangements are made.

I am concerned about the banks. The banks help a developer by providing the finances for the development and then the same bank provides the mortgages for those who want to buy those houses. The same bank was involved in the Gortview situation. It seemed that there was some easy way of transferring when all the legal requirements were not in place. It is important to ensure that the legal requirements are strengthened.

All the issues around unadopted roads did not happen just as a result of the economic downturn. We have to look back a few years. Is the Minister aware that his predecessor, Conor Murphy, set up an inquiry to find out how many unadopted roads and lanes there were across the country? Has there been any response to that report? Perhaps the Minister could give us that information at a later stage.

I have in front of me a report that deals with the Culbane Road in the Magherafelt area. That road is two-thirds adopted; the other third has not been adopted. The local people have been asked to bring the end of that laneway up to almost motorway standard, even though the rest of the road is not up to that standard. The Department's reply was very clear. It noted that, in many rural locations,

it would not make a lot of sense to make up those new parts to a full standard in narrow lanes or existing roads where adaptation has happened. That is the reality.

Therefore, to get a roadway or a lane adopted in a rural area, why should the local people be asked to bring it up to a standard way beyond the standard of the adopted road that they are driving on? That all adds to the confusion. I am sure that the Minister will come back to that issue in the future.

I welcome the fact that we are dealing with new estates and new roads that have not been finished or adopted. However, it is important to look back and deal with the matter equally across the board, because many lane-ways in rural areas have never been adopted. There are also some estates in towns where the roads have not been adopted. Sandy Row — of all names — in Coalisland has never been adopted or even tarmacked by Roads Service and it is about 100 yds from the town centre. That is an example of where Roads Service did not complete all the tasks when it adopted those roads.

There is a similar situation in an estate in Killowen in Coalisland that was built in the 1960s. The council took a bond but never finished the road at the time. It has never been tarmacked or adopted, and the people who live there still have a road that has large puddles and potholes, and it has devalued their houses. Therefore, although we are dealing with the report on the inquiry —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Molloy: — I ask the Minister to look back at previous experiences, and there are many of them.

Mrs D Kelly: When it gets to this stage, there is not an awful lot new that one can say. I welcome the Minister's presence for the debate and note his long service in the past as a local councillor. He will be very well aware of the difficulties faced by constituents in this matter. I am sure that the Minister is not happy to have inherited such a legacy from his predecessor, given that a number of recommendations within the report are amendments that can be brought forward by his Department to try to simplify the process and to hold people to greater account.

Other Members, including Mr Dickson in particular, referenced the responsibilities on the Law Society and lawyers when doing their conveyancing work and giving advice to potential homebuyers. After all, Mr Speaker, the purchase of a new home is the largest investment that most of us will ever make. During the Committee's inquiry, we heard horrendous stories of people having to live in developments in which there are neither adopted sewerage infrastructures nor, indeed, adopted roads. I am sure many people will understand that the non-adoption of roads in some of the housing developments has a direct implication for the provision of local council services, such as street cleansing and the collection of bins. In some cases, lawyers have been a bit too vociferous in their advice to councils not to collect the bins or lift litter from the streets, so there is no uniformity of advice across the district councils.

On the day that is in it, this is a very welcome debate. It is something that can make a real difference to people's lives. It will have a relevance to the industry, and if the Department and the Minister take forward some of the recommendations, particularly those around the amendments that are within his gift, which, I am sure he

will — I am ambitious for the Minister — it will also give some degree of certainty.

I thank the Committee staff and all those who contributed to the report and gave evidence to the inquiry, not least our local councillors and local councils. We found their advice to be very valuable, and they are to be commended. I endorse the report's recommendations.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

In accordance with established guidance, I will provide a full and substantive response to the Committee for Regional Development's report in due course, but it is important to respond to today's debate, which I very much welcome. I thank Members for their contribution. I am somewhat disappointed, however, at the premature issuing of a press release on behalf of the Committee for Regional Development before I had an opportunity to address the Assembly on the matter.

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

Members have highlighted the issue of unadopted roads on private developments and the distress that it can cause people. The vast majority of private street sites determined for adoption go through without the need for additional intervention from my Department. For example, in the past five years, Roads Service has adopted some 416 kilometres of new roads in housing developments, and Northern Ireland Water has adopted sewerage schemes in 772 developments. That said, I recognise that there are an increasing number of problem sites. In some cases, that is a consequence of the economic downturn, but, in all cases, I think it is as a result of developers washing their hands of their responsibilities. I am absolutely determined to tackle those developers and that legacy.

Officials in Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water have identified some 1,200 sites across Northern Ireland on which there has been no or limited progress by the developer. That is simply not acceptable. Officials are progressing through the list to finally deliver for the public adopted roads. The progress involves a process with some complexity, which, I think, has been acknowledged. Over the past four years, for example, Roads Service has issued 340 article 11 enforcement notices, which require the developer to complete necessary works to bring the roads and sewers up to the appropriate standard.

Let me be clear: the primary responsibility for providing new roads and sewers in housing developments lies with the developer. Although I have no immediate plans to change the private streets legislation, it does not follow that I rule out changes in the future to broaden the legislation. Developers must have that clear warning in mind when meeting their obligations under existing legislation. I can say with some confidence that, in recent times, the Department has been proactive in pursuing problem cases, and I want that progress to continue.

3.30 pm

Turning to the report itself, the Committee made 10 key recommendations. In principle, I support the policy direction that the Committee has taken. Indeed, in a sense, I take it as an endorsement of my Department's approach. I would like to comment on the recommendations, particularly those that fall within the remit of my Department. The report's first two recommendations relate to the level of bonds and procedures for calling

bonds in. I fully agree that the value of bonds must be set at appropriate levels to cover the completion of remedial works if required. Indeed, currently the bond calculation rates for new bonds are reviewed periodically to ensure that they reflect changing costs of road construction works. I remain committed to that approach.

I also support proposals for making procedures relating to the calling in of bonds as effective as possible. It is worth noting that, in addition to article 11 enforcement procedures, the current Private Streets Order provides for urgent repairs to the roads infrastructure, for example where there are immediate health or safety concerns. The most desirable solution is to facilitate the developer's completion of the roads and sewers to an adoptable standard at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to the report's third recommendation, namely that I review private streets legislation to ensure that it provides adequate measures to deal with increasing occurrences of unadopted roads, I can inform Members that Roads Service has reviewed the Private Streets Order in recent years. Therefore, I have no current plans for a further more comprehensive review of private streets legislation, but, as I have indicated, I am prepared to broaden its scope in respect of its impact.

The fact that the current private streets legislation has served its original purpose well is evidenced by the fact that, over the years, the majority of roads in new housing developments have been better and properly planned, approved and constructed. In due course, those roads have been adopted by Roads Service and have become part of the public road network.

There is no doubt that the economic pressures of recent years have increased the number of housing developments that have run into difficulties. As I said at the outset, we have some 1,200 sites pending. In dealing with such cases, the legislation and procedures for completing and adopting the affected roads have been tested.

In summary, while I do not plan any further comprehensive review of the Private Streets Order, I am willing to consider whether any procedures followed under the current legislation need to be further reviewed to enable my Department to deal effectively with instances where the process for the adoption of new housing development roads runs into problems. As I have said, I will not rule out changes in the future to broaden mechanisms or to hold developers responsible for completing roads and sewers in a timely manner.

The Committee's report goes on to recommend a review of the Water and Sewerage Services Order. In principle, I support the policy direction taken by the Committee in that regard. I would summarise it as a desire to see all sewerage infrastructure adopted as far as is reasonable. Nobody — I underline that word — wants to see households left without adequate sewerage provision, and I sympathise with all those who have found themselves in that position. Nonetheless, as the Committee rightly notes, this is a complex area with potentially significant resource implications. Detailed analysis of unadopted sewerage infrastructure needs to take place before we can confidently recommend the best way forward. We also have to be mindful of the many demands on investment in the water and sewerage infrastructure. We are all aware of the impact of flooding on many households this year.

Any analysis will have to examine existing policy and legislation, and identify how any necessary remedial work might be funded. When I have considered those issues thoroughly, I will be in a position to advise the Committee of my response, particularly with regard to the funding implications.

The report's fifth recommendation is that the Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA) should co-ordinate a prioritisation audit in each council area. I would support such an exercise. If NILGA agrees to take that recommendation forward, Roads Service and Northern Ireland Water will work in partnership with it.

I also welcome and support the sixth and seventh recommendations, which are for improved information resources for home buyers and the inclusion of any legal opinion on property certificates that helps to clarify the position on the adoption status of roads and sewers for potential home buyers. Officials from Roads Service and NI Water have already engaged with the Law Society on those issues. I again pledge my Department's support for any initiatives to improve matters in those important areas.

The report's eighth recommendation deals with procedures to effect prompt enforcement action when appropriate. Although my Department has processes in place to trigger bond enforcement and to guide through the various stages to completion, I am content to have those processes reviewed to ensure that they are appropriate for the current circumstances.

The last two recommendations relate to the establishment of a co-operation forum to agree how to deal with the issue of unadopted roads and sewers. It is proposed that that forum would be made up of representatives of residents, statutory and local government bodies, contractors, bond providers and the legal services. I am prepared to look at ways to take that work forward, and agree that the groups that are identified should be consulted and involved. However, I want to be clearer on the scope and direction of any work before committing my officials and resources to such a forum.

In conclusion, I welcome the Committee for Regional Development's report on its inquiry into unadopted roads. The scope of the recommendations recognises that many parties are involved. As I have stated previously, in order for private streets legislation to work as intended, it is essential that all parties that are involved play their part and discharge their responsibilities. That includes Roads Service, Northern Ireland Water, developers, planners, bond providers, solicitors and other stakeholders.

I will address quickly some of the issues that were raised in the debate. The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee, Mr Lynch, covered the background information to the report. I apologise that I was not in the Chamber for his initial comments. I got a sense firmly of his views on it and, indeed, on how things might be improved.

Mr McCrea, rightly, indicated his thanks and those of other Committee members to the Committee staff for having produced or helped to produce the report. Of course, he mentioned local government and his own particular areas of Cookstown and Magherafelt.

Mr Ross Hussey was very supportive of the report and also, helpfully, of the approach that was adopted by the

Department and Northern Ireland Water as we seek to deal with these matters.

Mr Dallat, rightly, highlighted the issue of resources, which will be key going forward. Mr Dickson mentioned supporting the NILGA audit, and the importance of that. One hopes that that co-operation will be available as we move forward.

Mr Easton explained the background to some of the problems experienced by householders and homeowners, and I think that all of us, on a constituency level, are aware of those issues.

Mr McAleer suggested that there should be a legal clause stating that developers should not be allowed to move to or begin work on another site until they have completed any existing work. That may be problematic legally and, from a construction and a builder's point of view, pragmatically. So we need to look at that very closely.

Mr Molloy welcomed the report. He raised the issue of Gortview, which he covered in a previous representation in the House. I am pleased that some progress has been made on that. He also returned to the issue of unadopted country lanes and alleyways. That was not the subject or focus of the debate, but I will attempt to update him on it. Of course, he also mentioned that an area in Sandy Row outside Coalisland is in a deplorable state. Perhaps if they organised a parade, things might improve — or maybe not.

Finally, as I said, I will give a full and comprehensive response to the Committee's report in due course. I hope that Members recognise how seriously I take the issue and, indeed, my determination to address the situation through the range of measures that I announced today.

Mr Lynch (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Regional Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. First, I want to address the Minister's concern about the press release. The report was embargoed until the commencement of this plenary debate, and I covered what is in the report. I accept his apologies for not being in the Chamber at the beginning. As we learned last week, we cannot be in all places at all times.

I want to thank the Chair and members of the Committee for Regional Development for their valuable contributions during the inquiry and in the debate today. I also want to thank the Minister and Members for their contributions; those who provided written and oral evidence to the Committee; the Assembly Research and Information Service; Hansard; and, finally, the Committee admin team for its continual support and help.

I am pleased that the Minister expressed his support for the policy direction taken both here today and in correspondence to the Committee in response to the report. The Committee fully understands the complexities of the subject matter and that the Minister and, indeed, his Executive colleagues may wish to reflect on the recommendations arising from the inquiry. I hope, however, that that reflection is not open-ended and that the Minister and his departmental officials will bring an action plan to the Committee early in the new year, detailing the pathway they wish to take, as well as the timings, to implement the report's recommendations. Certainly, we as a Committee, as a priority, want the legislation reviewed and improved information for residents.

I now want to respond to some of the comments offered by Members, some of which the Minister mentioned.

Mr McCrea updated the House on the day-to-day practicalities and problems faced by people living in unfinished developments, and he reiterated the need to trigger the bonds more quickly.

Mr Hussey accepted the fact that we need to move forward quickly on the matter. He stated that, in his experience, there appears to be a reluctance to draw on the bond. He reinforced the fact that the recommendations are pragmatic rather than complex and welcomed the development of a code of practice and a priority audit.

3.45 pm

Mr Dallat sympathised with the Minister on the potential cost of remedying the problem and offered him his support, in particular on bringing in new legislation. That is support that I and other members of Committee extend to the Minister.

Mr Dickson said that the report is an example of democracy at work. When a problem was brought to the Committee, it acted, and the result was sensible recommendations, in particular the creation of greater awareness among all stakeholders involved in the process. Mr Easton recognised that there is a fine balancing act to be struck between supporting residents and supporting developers under significant financial pressure. He particularly welcomed the proposed changes and the development of the property certificate.

My colleague Mr McAleer recognised the pragmatic and positive nature of the report, in that it does not seek to attribute blame but rather seeks resolution through consensus. He stated that local councils are ideally placed to undertake the prioritisation audit. My other colleague Mr Molloy welcomed the report and questioned how a house in his constituency could be sold when the sewers were not correctly connected. He sought information on a report conducted by the Minister's predecessor. I am sure that if that is available, the Committee will be keen to follow up on it. Mrs Kelly said that the process needs to be simplified and people held to account. She also stated that there needs to be uniformity in the advice offered to residents.

We have heard a number of descriptions of the report: pragmatic; sensible; positive; balanced; and reflective. I thank Members for their kind words. The Committee does not set out to find blame but rather solutions. We did not set out to accuse but rather to advise. We did not set out to score points but rather to make points — points that are practicable, appropriate and protective and that can be acted on. On behalf of the Committee for Regional Development, I strongly commend the report to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly approves the report of the Committee for Regional Development on its inquiry into unadopted roads in Northern Ireland (NIA 44/11/15); and calls on the Minister for Regional Development, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues and relevant bodies, to implement the recommendations.

Private Members' Business

Narrow Water Bridge

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

Mrs McKeivitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly recognises the significant social and economic benefits, particularly for tourism, that will flow from the proposed Narrow Water bridge project in south Down; notes that the project has obtained planning consent on both sides of the border; welcomes the support of the Irish Government for the project and the Special EU Programmes Body's decision to allocate very substantial funding for the bridge; calls on the Executive to make explicit their support for the project; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make clear his commitment to the successful delivery of the Narrow Water bridge project and to take the lead, along with his counterparts in the Irish Government, in ensuring that any remaining finance required to complete the funding package is committed immediately.

I am delighted to be given the privilege of proposing the motion on behalf of the SDLP, and I ask each Member to support it. The House often has to deal with complicated issues involving the conflict of valid viewpoints, the careful weighing up of cost and benefit, and the advantage and disadvantage to various constituencies, communities and interests. I am happy to be able to say that today we are not dealing with such an issue. This one is simple and it is clear for all to see where the good choice lies. Its rightness and merit is self-evident.

I am a passionate supporter of the Narrow Water bridge project and have been since I first heard about the proposal at a young age. It was a local Warrenpoint GP, Dr Donal O'Tierney, who first made the proposal in response to a consultation on the new Newry plan in 1971. The east border region committee, one of five cross-border networks comprising 10 local authorities, was founded in 1976, and item number one on the agenda of its inaugural meeting was the Narrow Water bridge. At that time, the estimated cost of the bridge was £1 million.

In 1979, Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth County Council commissioned an engineering survey that showed that a bridge would be very feasible. The proposal has enjoyed wide support since then. The Narrow Water bridge action group was reformed in 1991. Many individuals from our communities in south Down and north Louth have lobbied continuously ever since. The only issue that I have with that little bit of research was discovering that the idea of the bridge and me appear to have been conceived around the same time.

I back the project because it is a genuinely symbolic cross-border project. It provides the first bridge that links Ireland North and South. It makes the very best of good sense at a socio-economic level and in every conceivable measure of community benefit. With the imaginative leadership and good management that we are asking the Assembly to

mandate, the benefit can ripple outwards to large parts of Northern Ireland. We are asking the House to back not just a bridge but a vision.

Narrow Water, An Caol Uisce in Irish, is the point at which the estuary of the Clanrye river becomes the open sea lough of Carlingford. There was a ferry service in modern times. It is believed to have begun some 1,400 years ago to carry pilgrims heading for the grave of St Patrick at Downpatrick. Since the 1200s, the strategic choke point has been guarded by a high stone keep-tower. Its narrowing ship channel once brought trade and prosperity to the town of Newry.

The drive around Carlingford lough is undoubtedly one of the most scenic in Ireland. From Narrow Water into Newry, the drivers on each side have a clear view of one another. The bridge would knock about 10 miles off the round trip, which would save perhaps 20 to 25 minutes when you consider that the shopping traffic in Newry is heavy. However, that is only one tiny aspect of the potential of the project, and probably the least important. We must all keep our eye on the bigger vision. The Executive's Programme for Government, in line with the economic proposals that we have advanced over the years, put a major focus on the job-creation potential of tourism. In comparison with other growth areas, tourism offers several significant advantages, and probably the greatest of those is that the levers of growth are already largely in our hands; we are not dependent on major external investment. Even where infrastructural investment is required — this is the case — the cost tends to be relatively moderate and the facilities created tend to have multiple uses.

At the community level, it is very important to note that a high proportion of tourism revenue stays in the area of spend. Of course, tourism tends to create jobs in places that other industries are unlikely to reach in the foreseeable future. In fact, tourism jobs are unlikely to be created in many major new facilities; they are more likely to come in small numbers as existing providers expand capacity. That process will start with accommodation providers increasing their average numbers of bed nights per year.

We are firm believers in that incremental approach. In my area, I am keenly aware that the people who are engaged in tourism and who hope to invest and expand in it are crying out for that project and more like it. Of course, those businesspeople are aware that bridges alone do not bring all that many people to an area, but that is where the vision must come in. This is the moment to envisage the greater Carlingford lough concept; to realise that the Mourne, the Ring of Gullion and Cooley form a natural coherent destination area of their own, like the Ring of Kerry, the Causeway Coast and the lakelands. Right at the heart of the new destination area, we are to have something new: a connecting point, a symbol, a pivot on which the whole area can turn. Our elegant new bridge at Narrow Water can become an icon and an essential marketing image for the new destination. That is the vision that people who are already in the tourism business or are considering investing in it are beginning to glimpse. It is very important that we, their representatives, can see it, too. We will be required to understand the need for intelligent, targeted marketing, and we must facilitate it. Those businesspeople, whom I meet regularly in the new

local forum, are able to tell me exactly where the marketing must be targeted.

Even in these recessionary times, we are still getting six million to eight million tourists on the island of Ireland every year. Some five million of them come through Dublin, which means that they would be just 60 minutes away from our shiny new bridge, the icon of our new destination area, and about 90 miles from the heart of the Mourne, which is one of the six signature projects announced by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM). I do not know how many of those five million ever make it over the border. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that we were able to attract just 1% of them as far as Carlingford lough, where most would no doubt cross our new bridge. Those 50,000 people would, as we know, spend an average of £100 a day. That is heading for £5 million a year out of the most basic tourism offering, before we begin to consider what value we could add as the numbers build up. Where else could you even begin to look for ideas to generate that sort of revenue in a limited geographical area?

All that is doable by our effects. We can do this, working at very little cost alongside the people in the industry. It is really just a matter of getting our act together and extracting more value from what is already being done. We do not have to make major investment. We do not have to go around the world looking for people; they are already coming to Ireland. We just have to reach them and make them an offer that they cannot refuse. We do not get many opportunities like this. We do not get many chances to do such unquestionable good for everyone. It is with no sense of parochial political interest that I say that it is even hard to imagine how scarce EU funding could be put to better use than this. I challenge even the most mean-minded naysayer to find a serious downside to the Narrow Water bridge project. This project has some of the most genuine, broad-based community support on both sides of the border that I have ever seen.

I am now going to tell a wee joke, probably one of the oldest local jokes around. It is possibly worse than those of the Finance Minister. It goes like this: people should always listen to the people from Omeath; after all, they are the smartest people in Ireland. Why, I hear you say, are they the smartest people in Ireland? That is because they can always see the Point. That is Warrenpoint, for those who do not know the geography. And that is the end of the joke.

The Narrow Water bridge project naturally has the enthusiastic backing of all the Members from South Down. However, it has much more than that. It has the broadest possible backing among the people. I make no excuses whatsoever for being passionate about the project, because we are, at least, heading towards the realisation of a dream. It is not my dream; it goes back before my time in politics. It was in the dark days of the mid 1970s that far-sighted representatives — the like of PJ Bradley — and public spirited citizens came together to look at the potential for a bridge crossing at Narrow Water, at a time when our part of the country was unfortunately not best known for bridge-building. I am glad to say that many of those people are still with us. We will proudly honour them on the happy day when the tape is cut for the opening of the new bridge.

Mr Irwin: In the current financial climate, when Departments are exercising great budgetary control and seeking to direct funding to projects that are of a high priority, the Narrow Water project appears, by all accounts, like a project that would be undertaken if every other more pressing need had been met. That, as we are all aware, is not the case.

Mrs D Kelly: I thank the Member for giving way. Given that we are now into the second year of the social investment fund without any spend, would the Member concede that there is an opportunity to put £1 million of the £40 million that has been set aside for social investment into such a project that could boost the local economy and provide jobs in tourism?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr Irwin: I accept the Member's point, but I believe that there are much more pressing projects that need to be done.

I feel that it is very far-fetched to refer to the Narrow Water project as a tourism-driving, high-priority, traffic management-improving, rush-hour-beating key objective to expand and improve our infrastructure. Indeed, any publicity surrounding the bridge has focused only on tourism. Yet tourism alone is hardly a strong enough argument on which to base such an expensive undertaking.

Although some funding has been secured for the bridge project from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), it is not a simple kit of parts from Europe that can be assembled at Narrow Water so that everyone goes away happy.

4.00 pm

Far from it. This project requires significant investment from our devolved government, and that is where greater thought is required. In recent times, the buzzword around Newry city has been "boom". I refer to the considerable levels of cross-border trade that retailers in the city have been enjoying, which are very welcome and have helped to sustain trade in Newry, particularly in times of intense competition in the retail sector. This has been greatly assisted by the completion of a successful cross-border upgrade scheme that has significantly reduced journey times between Dublin and Belfast and improved access to towns and cities along the route, including, of course, Newry city. In my opinion, there is significant benefit in maintaining Newry as a retail destination for both the domestic and cross-border markets, and our road infrastructure developments have contributed to establishing it as a shopping hub.

I understand that the roads Minister is overseeing a southern relief road scheme for Newry and has already spent around £1 million on consultancy fees for all the various assessment procedures necessary when considering such an extensive proposal. Feasibility studies have shown that having a road that links Warrenpoint dual carriageway to the Belfast-Dublin corridor would be of significant benefit in reducing heavy goods vehicle traffic at various junctions in Newry, improving access to the port of Warrenpoint and making the city much less congested for businesses, shoppers and visitors. That is the sort of long-term infrastructure investment that we should put our weight behind — a project that will deliver real and tangible benefits for our local economy and offer greater accessibility to the region.

I remain unconvinced that the Narrow Water bridge would in any way enhance the current situation in Newry city or the tourism of the Mourne and Cooley areas. As I have said, the pitch for the bridge is based largely on tourism. Yet, tourists in the area will naturally want to visit Newry city. Why, then, build a bridge that will channel people away from the city as a destination, all in the name of taking a few minutes off travel times? Let us face it — tourists enjoy travelling. If all other pressing and infrastructure targets were achieved, including the southern relief road, the bridge would be an interesting landscape design feature. We are a long way from such an ideal set of circumstances. Therefore, I urge the Finance Minister to give long and thorough consideration to the issue and to bring forward more important key infrastructure improvements that would benefit our economy on a much wider scale.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. The Narrow Water bridge project has caught the imagination of the people of south Down and Louth alike, as the now palpable prospect of this great connector has given them boundless hope that the economic prosperity, so often related to other tourism projects such as the Titanic Quarter or the north coast, will be harnessed to create an economic boost in our east border region.

For years, various groups and individuals have worked tirelessly to secure the viability of this project, with the working group established to support the bridge being led by the chambers of commerce in Warrenpoint, Burren, Rostrevor and Killeel. Most of those people have small businesses that are crying out for the infrastructural support that is needed to develop the tourism potential of this grossly underdeveloped area.

Those small businesses are acutely aware that their very survival depends on the development of such vital tourism infrastructure. With that in mind, it is no surprise to see local businesses and the tourism industry standing shoulder to shoulder behind this proposal. The passion and zeal that they display on behalf of the people of the region are remarkable and were evident in recent months, when so many gave up their weekends to walk the roads and lane ways of south Down and Louth to collect names for a petition of support. Some of us were with them and were lucky enough to witness many thousands of local people show their support for this project. Indeed, the more than 3,000 signatures gathered in such a short time are testament to the determination of those on both sides of Carlingford lough to finally see investment in that beautiful part of Ireland.

Located on the east coast of Ireland, Carlingford lough nestles between the Mourne to the North and the Cooleys to the South. It is an area of outstanding natural beauty that is the equal to anywhere in Ireland. With the correct infrastructure, it will be somewhere that tourists flock to in their hundreds of thousands. Connecting two historic areas of Down and Louth, the Narrow Water bridge is an important cross-border road project that would be the catalyst to developing the entire region's tourism potential by facilitating access to a spectacular area of mountain ranges, shimmering loughs and many miles of unspoilt coastline. It will provide a significant boost to an underdeveloped tourism industry, and it will help to create

much-needed employment for the local construction industry.

The area has been deprived of infrastructural investment for far too long. Considering the relatively small cost of the bridge in terms of overall infrastructure spending, a bridge at Narrow Water will finally provide a great boost for the entire east coast region and will help Counties Down, Armagh and Louth to fulfil their economic and tourist potential. There is no doubt that the benefits to tourism and local commerce will see the bridge pay for itself many times over. There is also no doubt that the Narrow Water bridge makes economic and commercial sense. It will provide a vital infrastructure connection that links North and South, and that would assist economic and tourism development in particular in an area that desperately needs new investment for jobs and growth.

The new bridge will certainly attract more visitors and create longer stays in the region. Both those factors will result in increased tourism spending in the locality, generating strong economic gains across the region. South Down and Louth desperately need those gains. The bridge will also act as a necessary catalyst to massively increase traffic between the new Mourne coastal drive and the Boyne valley drive that Louth County Council and Meath County Council have been developing. That will be a hugely positive development for our local tourism industry in places such as Strangford, Killyleagh, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Kilkeel, which have long been crying out for such infrastructural investment.

I believe that tourism can be a catalyst for economic regeneration, especially at a time when other industries such as construction and engineering are suffering. So, we need to look at what tourism provides. It can help to create and secure jobs in the hospitality and service industries, but we need to ensure that we are geared to meet the demands if we get it right. Although I am delighted that the Narrow Water bridge is coming on stream and that it will connect south Down to Carlingford, we need to do more right across the south Down area. There is a lack of hotels and beds in general in the area to cope with an influx of people. Our road infrastructure and signage need improving, and people need to be trained in appreciating the visitors who come to visit us.

Indeed, I was a visitor at a local attraction in Downpatrick on Friday evening. It welcomes more than 100,000 visitors a year, but it has been in a lengthy battle with Roads Service for basic, adequate signage. It is crucial that such blockages are removed as soon as possible if we are to continue to welcome visitors to the south Down area, whether for outdoor activities, historical and cultural tourism or just for a bit of peace and quiet. I am delighted that SEUPB has announced that the Narrow Water bridge will be funded under INTERREG II, and I congratulate everyone who is involved in the campaign, especially the various chambers of commerce.

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

Mr Hazzard: The bridge has been delivered by everyone working together on a cross-party and cross-border basis, and it highlights what can be achieved by working together. I support the motion.

Mr McCallister: I thank colleagues for securing the debate. I will start by saying that I have some concerns

about the bridge. In line with other colleagues, we would much prefer to see a southern relief road being built. Perhaps the Minister will confirm that it is not an either/or choice. My understanding is that it is not going to be an either/or choice, so, as a constituency Member, I will support the motion and the construction of the bridge. However, I will do so as long as it is not, as I have consistently said, at the expense of a southern relief road, which would offer huge benefits to Warrenpoint harbour, Newry and right across the south Down area.

Mr Boylan: I thank the Member for giving way and for bringing up the southern relief road. Does he not agree with me that it should not be a competition, because there are two separate issues and two separate pots of money? I am making up now for what I will say in my own contribution. Does the Member not see that it should not be about competition between the two projects?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCallister: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I am grateful to the Member. I am sure that the Minister will confirm that they are not competing projects, as, indeed, my colleague the Minister for Regional Development has confirmed and as his colleague the previous Minister for Regional Development would have confirmed. So, there are concerns about that, and I think that it is worth re-emphasising that how this came about did not create competing pots of money.

The other issue that has been raised with me concerns mussel fishermen's access to the upper part of Carlingford lough. I am sure that the Minister will discuss that with colleagues to see how those issues can be facilitated to deal with mussel fishermen's needs and concerns.

Moving on, Mr Deputy Speaker, as a constituency Member I welcome what we have secured. I know that there were two projects in Warrenpoint that were seeking funding. I support both those projects and, of course, the marina as well. As an MLA for the constituency I welcome this proposal and I recognise that it can benefit the wider south Down economy if we can link it in to that and bring more tourists to the area and increase tourist spend. That is what we need to do.

We also have to recognise that it works both ways. I am sure that the bridge will not carry one-way traffic so that once you get into South Down you cannot get out of it again. We have to recognise that there may be a flow the other way, and we have to account for that. However, if we can improve the tourism potential of Warrenpoint, Kilkeel, Newcastle and across the Mourne area, that will be to the good of the South Down constituency and its small businesses and tourist enterprises. That is something to be welcomed. I am sure that the Minister will welcome anything that improves the economy or the potential of south Down.

Although I recognise that tourism drives the economy, the bridge itself is not about wider economic activity because it is primarily a project about bringing tourism in. The design of the bridge is such that it will not carry heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). It will be very much for tourism traffic. I have serious concerns about the infrastructure on the County Louth side of the bridge, which needs to be looked at. There needs to be an undertaking that it is likely to be upgraded over the next number of years.

Mr Elliott: Does the Member have any idea — are there any figures at all — as to the amount of traffic that the bridge will carry every day?

Mr McCallister: I have no idea what the amount of traffic would likely be, so I cannot clarify that. However, I am sure that, when he responds to the debate, the Minister will be happy to answer my honourable friend's question.

The bridge is very much designed for tourism traffic; it is not designed for commercial vehicles. Therefore, the economic benefit will be primarily driven by tourism in south Down, and not the wider economy. I do not want Members to think that it is going to have a huge impact on Warrenpoint harbour or on surrounding businesses, because it will not. It is a tourism project, and in that sense, it makes a valuable contribution to tourism in south Down, linking us to and bringing more tourism from the Republic of Ireland, that is something that I welcome.

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

Mr McCallister: I hope that it succeeds in doing that, having secured the funding and planning permission.

Mr Lunn: I am happy to support the motion and I welcome the announcement, which has been a long time coming. I remember that, back in the 1970s, when I was travelling around south Down as a young insurance man, this was talked about quite actively. It was expected to happen, perhaps at a cost of £1 million instead of £25 million.

Mr McCallister has expressed some quite reasonable reservations, but at least he is going to support the building of the bridge. I listened to Mr Irwin with interest, because he seemed to think that the construction of a bridge such as this will give people an excuse not to go to Newry. If people want to go to Newry they will go to Newry. If they want to go from Carlingford to Newcastle, why should they have to go through Newry, given that we do not have the southern relief road that is being talked about?

This is a terrific scheme, but local access in both directions is good for both jurisdictions and is a perfect use of INTERREG funds. In fact, it is the first really good one that I can remember.

4.15 pm

I am a fairly frequent visitor to Carlingford and to the Cooley peninsula. For a start, it is one of the most beautiful parts of Ireland, but you are also looking across the lough at an equally beautiful part of Ireland. Why on earth would anyone object to a simple project to link the two areas? From a tourism point of view, it is a penalty kick. We should embrace it, and I would be surprised if anyone wants to do otherwise.

I read in the information pack that Mrs Foster announced recently that, in the past four years, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board spent about £6.8 million on capital infrastructure in the Mourne area. Why would you do that and not encourage people from another jurisdiction to come to it? The potential for the whole loop — across the bridge and along either side — is immense.

I also go to Donegal quite a bit, and the infrastructure created there — from Magilligan across Lough Foyle, from Bunrana across to the Fanad peninsula, and now from the new Harry Blaney bridge across to the Rosguill peninsula — has brought enormous benefit, I understand,

to some of the towns in the northern parts of those peninsulas. This is good economics. It makes sense.

I really hope that there will not be any major objections from any particular party. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say. I have been watching his body language for the past 20 minutes, and I think that it is fair to say that he has the look on his face that he normally reserves for debates about global warming or green energy. It remains to be seen. However, I look forward to hearing from him.

This is a case of looking a gift horse in the mouth. As I understand it, and I have just asked the SDLP, there would be a possible £1 million cost to the Northern Ireland exchequer. Frankly, this is peanuts as regards a scheme that is potentially so beneficial, is at a cost of something over €20 million, and for which we have to pay only £1 million. I am almost lost for words.

I hope that the bridge will go ahead. A major campaign has been mounted in south Down over the years. I congratulate everybody involved, and I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in due course.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Members for tabling the motion. I am not exactly burning with opposition to it, but I am not overcome with support either. Some things about the motion are quite bizarre, and I will talk about a few of them.

Where the motion has come from is most bizarre. It comes from the same Bench that, two weeks ago, brought us to the cusp of millions of pounds of daily fines because we have not been able to meet our targets in pension and welfare reforms, but seems to think that €17.4 million, of which £1 million comes from our Executive, can almost be tossed to the side for the sake of an 18-minute cut in the time between Omeath and Warrenpoint. We have to get ourselves back to the priorities, and there has to be consistency from the Assembly.

I accept that I am not a representative of the area, although you can probably tell by looking at me that I have enjoyed many an ice cream in the Genoa Café in Warrenpoint and visit it regularly in the summer. I know the area where the bridge will come to very well.

We have to ask ourselves honestly how necessary the project is. I accept the fact that there is a substantial amount of money from the INTERREG programme, which is to be welcomed. However, I do not get the argument that this will create a massive wave of cross-border migration that is not already happening. The fact is that, with the improvements that have been made to the A1 and the N1 motorway, there are some 20,000 daily users of that cross-border route.

I will answer Mr Elliott's point, because I have done my research, unlike the Member for South Down. It is estimated that there will be 1,036 users of the bridge a day. That will not be today or tomorrow but by 2033, and that is in comparison with the current 20,000 daily users at the cross-border junction between the A1 and N1.

What concerns me about the motion is the message that it sends out. It is very easy to say that £1 million is peanuts, and I completely accept what Mr Lunn said about that amount in construction terms. However, we all have housing estates in our constituencies. We all have people coming into our constituency offices every day of the

week who have particular financial challenges. We have to be very careful about sending out a message from this place that we take an almost blasé view to this money, regardless of whether it comes from Europe or out of our own pockets. One million pounds is a lot of money and would make a huge difference to, for example, the Doury Road estate in Ballymena, which I represent and which has huge social problems. I am sure that every Member in the Chamber can recount estates in their constituency where £1 million would go a long way to fixing substandard housing and dealing with a number of other issues.

Dr McDonnell: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: Yes, I will.

Dr McDonnell: Does the Member accept that that is exactly the same argument that was advanced when we went to build the Waterfront Hall in Belfast? Does the Member accept that there are those who advanced the same argument about Titanic Belfast a couple of years ago, and yet it is one of the outstanding successes? Does the Member accept that you sometimes have to speculate a little bit of money to get what you want? There will always be a case for saying no. However, in this case, surely it is 90% or 95% yes.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Member for the intervention. I am not opposing the motion or speaking out against it. I am just trying to tease out the arguments.

To use the proposer's words, this is a symbolic North/South project. I cannot see the benefits of the bridge being overwhelming in the immediate, medium or perhaps even long term compared with the draw that the Waterfront and Titanic Belfast have been. There was a clear economic benefit to those projects. I cannot see 1,036 users of this bridge in 20 years' time, which is a long, long way away, bringing overwhelming benefits. If that is our benchmark, we have to be realistic about what the bridge will achieve.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr D McIlveen: I am sorry, but I am running out of time.

What I will say is that this is what the INTERREG programme is for. I am not denying that, and I have no difficulty with that. However, we have the Finance Minister here, and I say to him that, rather than bog ourselves down with INTERREG —

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

Mr D McIlveen: — we should be looking at the European social fund, which creates a lot more opportunities for the people whom we represent than this bridge will.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh an rún. I welcome the motion and will speak in favour of it.

First, I want to make a few points in response to the Members who have spoken already. We sit in here day and daily talking about opportunities for creating employment and about using money to create employment. Here is an opportunity to create employment. I listened to 'The Nolan Show' one day last week —

Mrs D Kelly: Shame on you.

Mr Boylan: I know, but it is a long drive from down our way.

We rolled out a programme backed by the Executive called Our Time Our Place. I read about the signature projects, Titanic Belfast and the Giant's Causeway, in the newspapers countless times. That is fine, and we all support those projects. However, there is a beautiful area in south Down that has a good tourism product, and we are not exploiting it.

Mr Elliott: Will the Member give way?

Mr Boylan: I will, yes.

Mr Elliott: The Member is so anxious to support south Down. Does that mean he is recommending a national park for the area as well?

Mr Boylan: I will get into that in a minute. I will respond to that intervention in one minute.

From an Armagh point of view, I hold no grudge about south Down stealing St Patrick from us. There is a good tourism product there. You do not need the designation of a national park to bring tourism to the area. We should be looking at a proper tourism strategy. From reading some recent reports, I know that properties have been bought in the area, so people do see a wee bit of potential when it comes to investment in the area and what might be coming forward.

Besides all the talk about the issues that people have raised, I want to commend some people. Newry and Mourne District Council, along with Louth County Council, formed this memorandum of understanding. We are talking about empowering communities and giving more powers to local authorities, and here is a situation in which the local authority is taking the lead in trying to bring the project forward. If you were saying to me that they are asking for £20 million from the Executive, that could raise the bar, but the money required is, I think, £1 million; 95% or 99% of the money is there. It is a good project, and it presents an opportunity. I had the privilege of sitting on the East Border Region Committee, representing Armagh City and District Council. The committee supported the project and put a lot of work into it. The project should be supported.

I want to touch on the issue of the southern relief road. I thank the Member for South Down for bringing it up. There is a good economic driver in the form of Warrenpoint port. It is one of the best performing ports on the island, and it is a good economic driver. Suggestions have been brought forward, and the Department for Regional Development (DRD) has done a feasibility study. That would be another good project. I mention it because I do not want it to get into competition with the other project; it should not be that way. If it is an economic driver and it will take the traffic away — there are traffic problems in Newry city — it should be regarded as a separate project and be assessed on its own merits. It is as simple as that.

I am waiting patiently for the Minister to get up. Obviously, he will give me the opportunity to intervene in his speech if needs be. Minister, this project is asking for £1 million to get it over the line, and there is good scope for it to provide employment in the tourism sector. There are very few capital build projects coming from the Executive and initiatives to help create employment from a public sector point of view. Here is a product that we can look at. I have seen projects in other areas of the North, so I support this project.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, LeasCheann Comhairle. Éirím le tacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo,

agus bheirim buíochas do mo chomhghleacaithe as é a thabhairt os comhair an Tionóil. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in the debate. I thank my colleagues for tabling the motion.

Building bridges is something that mankind has done since time immemorial. It is not just about the practicality of crossing a piece of water or a deep gorge and it is not just about the creation of a piece of transport infrastructure; it is about the achievement of overcoming a huge challenge that makes life better for a community. It makes life better for them by giving access, by linking neighbours, by enabling trade and, most importantly, by expanding horizons.

Mr McIlveen is right that a bridge is a huge symbol: it is a huge symbol for humanity.

Settlements have grown into villages, towns and cities around fording places and bridges, so bridges are a proven stimulus to growth and development.

4.30 pm

Building this bridge will link Northern Ireland and the Republic, and it can be seen as a local piece of infrastructure that will link County Down to County Louth. It will facilitate local people and encourage good neighbourliness. It can also be seen as a valuable piece of tourism infrastructure that will open up the kingdom of Mourne and beyond to tourists from one of the most densely populated areas of this island, including the greater Dublin area. It will attract visitors in greater numbers and create jobs in tourism in Warrenpoint, Rostrevor, Kilkeel, Annalong, Newcastle, the Brontë country and the other St Patrick's country around Downpatrick. It will send out a very strong message locally, nationally and internationally of good neighbourliness between the two parts of this island, and that will, in turn, enhance Northern Ireland as a destination for tourism and, indeed, for foreign direct investment.

We often hear parties in this House say that they want good neighbourliness between the North and the South on this island. We hear them say that they want to attract more tourists from the Republic into Northern Ireland, and they also say that the Republic is a growing market for tourism. The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment said that.

We want to send out a strong message to all communities that we have moved beyond the Troubles of the past decades. This bridge gives us the opportunity to do all those things at very little cost to the public purse here.

Why should we spurn such an opportunity and stifle the growth of good neighbourliness? Why would we decline the chance to grow our tourism numbers and the tourism industry? Why should we seek to send out the wrong message that we are still stuck in petty squabbles that will not allow us to grow and develop and that we will not build a bridge?

This is a time for leadership: leadership that will encourage good neighbourliness; leadership that will bring an important impetus to our tourism industry; leadership that will create jobs at a time of recession; and leadership that will send out a strong positive message locally, nationally, whichever way you interpret that, and internationally. The

message will be that we have bridged the troubled waters and moved on to a better place.

Isaac Newton once said:

"We build too many walls and not enough bridges".

God knows, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have built enough walls here in Northern Ireland.

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

Mr D Bradley: Let us, for a change, build a bridge, and build it at Narrow Water.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I assure you that I will not burst into a Simon and Garfunkel song after that contribution.

I will say at the very start of this response that I will not support the motion, and I will outline some of the reasons why. Indeed, it is rather unfortunate for the project and for the whole INTERREG selection process that we are having this debate today.

I want to clear up a couple of issues, and I do not really want to get into the project itself or the detail of it for reasons that I will elaborate on in a moment or two. First, although the emphasis has been on the tourist potential of the bridge, I draw Members' attention to the economic appraisal. Some Members who spoke probably know about that better than I do, but the main reason given for the bridge is not the tourist potential. Indeed, the second most important reason given is not the tourist potential. The appraisal states that it is unlikely that any large proportion of additional visitors who come to the area will be specifically attributable to the existence of the bridge. So let us knock on the head at the very start the idea that this will open some golden era of tourism potential.

The second issue is the cost of the project. I repeat that it is not the case that, for £1 million, you get a bridge. First, the amount of money that will come from Departments in Northern Ireland is £2.8 million, but, more importantly, until this project is completed, the risk of the whole cost of the bridge rests with the Executive in Northern Ireland. If this bridge were not completed on time, with the final bills in by June 2015, we would lose all of the money that had been put into this project because we would have missed the European deadline. That is an important point when it comes to some of the issues that I want to talk about.

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will, yes.

Mr Allister: As it is INTERREG money, there is not only the contribution that the EU will make but the contribution that the various Departments will make. Is the Minister saying that, on top of the £2.8 million that we would collectively contribute in Northern Ireland, there could be the additional risk to whatever the sum is that the EU commits because of non-completion? In other words, delivery lies at the heart of this. What is the total risk factor in both EU and local finance that Northern Ireland could be required to pay back in penalties to Brussels?

Mr Wilson: The total costs attributable to Northern Ireland are £10.8 million, £8.1 million of which would come from INTERREG money and £2.8 million from departmental match funding. Before anyone points out to me that the two add up to £10.9 million and says that I cannot count,

those are the round figures. That is the total exposure, and that is important when it comes to some of the points that I want to make.

Mr Elliott: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Wilson: I will give way, yes.

Mr Elliott: The Minister said that £2.8 million would come from Northern Ireland Departments. Will he outline which Departments? On several occasions during the debate, a £1 million exposure from the Northern Ireland Executive was mentioned.

Mr Wilson: It is £2.8 million, and most of it will come from DRD's roads budget.

I will make it clear why I will not support the motion. First, the final decision on this has not been made. The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is the accountable Department. Once a decision has been made by the programme steering committee, which it was on 24 October, all the paperwork comes to the Department of Finance and Personnel and all the relevant documentation is sought. We will look at the costs, the benefits, the value for money, the deliverability and the risk before we make a final decision.

Most Members will accept that it would be most inappropriate for me as Minister to make a judgement to support or oppose the project before all of that relevant work has been done by my Department. The way in which this application has been handled is not helpful to the process, and, indeed, it could present considerable risks.

The first reason why I will not support this is that it is my job to make up my mind once I have received information assessments by the officials — the professionals in my Department — on all the relevant documentation and all the relevant issues. However, the one thing that I can say is that no one has ever been able to accuse me of making up my mind on the basis of whether I like who proposes or opposes a motion, or on the basis of where it comes from. Unlike Ministers from Sinn Féin and the SDLP, I have not had my judgement called into question by the courts. I do not intend for that to happen, and, for that reason, I will not be making a prejudgement on the issue today.

A second point to this concerns me. I am concerned because of the risk to which it puts Northern Ireland money, and, indeed, the whole process. I have never had an application for any European money, whether INTERREG or Peace, for which has been the degree of political interest, involvement and dabbling that there has been with this application. The fact that we are debating this motion is but the tip of the iceberg.

Let me just give a bit of the history of this matter. When the application was first made, it was turned down, and 12 others were accepted. It was turned down basically on the issue of whether it was deliverable. Quite rightly, there is an appeals mechanism, which people have every right to benefit from. That decision was overturned at the appeal. The main issue was whether the money could be spent on time. There were considerable risks. There is the pre-qualification period, when the firms that are eligible to tender would be looked at, followed by the tender period, and then by the building period. Even by a modest assessment, all those were going to take the project well beyond the June 2015 deadline. I do not mean by weeks or even by months; I mean by many months.

Do not forget that, by the assessment stage, there had been considerable political lobbying on this. Indeed, there had been a list of people who had sought, unusually enough, to —

Dr McDonnell: Will the Minister give away?

Mr Wilson: No. I will give way in a moment or two. Let me finish the point. There had been considerable political lobbying by SDLP representatives, officials, etc, all of which, thankfully, SEUPB declined. However, considerable political interest had been expressed in the whole project. When it came to the steering committee's doing the pre-assessment, suddenly the marks on this most vital of issues were increased by 120%. It is reasonable for me, as Minister, to ask: how come the steering committee got it so wrong the first time, or how come it revised its opinion so dramatically the second time? This is an important issue. If the committee got it wrong, we will lose not simply the amount of money that has not been spent; we will lose all the money. Not only will we put public money in Northern Ireland at risk but we will put other projects at risk, which may get knocked off the list.

There is another issue. I see that the Environment Minister is in the Chamber. This was an article 31 planning application, so it was decided and signed off by the planning Minister. He may want to correct me on this, but we have never had an article 31 planning application, with all the sensitivities that are involved in this one, dealt with so quickly. It just so happened that the Minister signed it off two days before the committee made the decision. Given the lobbying that was done, one has to ask: how come an article 31 planning application on this issue was determined so quickly?

When it came to the steering committee's decision on 24 October, the chairman addressed the committee about confidentiality. However, some of those who were on the committee decided to leak a confidential decision. I can only guess their motives. Before the meeting was over, the message was out that the committee had made the decision. Again, for what motive, other than perhaps to put some pressure on to make sure that it went through? And then, of course —

4.45 pm

Mr Attwood: Will the Member give way?

Mr Wilson: Since I have mentioned the Minister, yes, I will.

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for giving way. First, he needs to check his facts, quite a few of which have been in error during his contribution. One of the facts that he needs to check is this: I did not make any decision two days before the SEUPB decided to fund the project. That is wrong, and I invite the Member to correct the record in Hansard, because it is wrong. The more substantive point, of course, is this: I do not know whether Sammy has his ears open at all Executive meetings, but he will recall —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Interventions are meant to be brief. In addition, I am advised that it is not in order for two Ministers to speak during the one debate.

Mr Wilson: All I can say, and these are the facts —

Mr Attwood: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I am not speaking as a Minister. I am speaking as an MLA who has been asked to confirm the situation regarding

a decision that I took as Minister. Therefore, as an MLA, I am correcting the record, and I ask you to give me the freedom to make that correction.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Clearly, there was reference to your decision as a Minister earlier on.

Mr Wilson: The facts are as follows: a planning application for the bridge was made on 9 February, and the committee was notified before 24 October that the Minister had made a decision on the planning application. That must be one of the quickest article 31s that there has ever been in Northern Ireland. I draw that fact to the attention of the House because it backs up the point that I want to make, which is this: the application was dealt with by the Minister — it was dealt with very shortly — and, indeed, it was signed off on the day that the committee met, which was 24 October 2012. We have to take those points into consideration.

This has nothing to do with the content of the application itself, but I believe that it is important to have a thorough investigation of the application process. At the end of the day, I will make the decision following the advice that I am given by the economists in my Department as to whether this represents value for money and whether there is any danger.

The last thing that I will say is this: I believe that there is a political smell around this application. I believe that it is wrong that it was brought to the House today —

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

Mr Wilson: For those reasons, and the fact that I am not going to prejudge any decision that I have to make as Minister, I oppose the motion.

Mr Rogers: Forget about the politicking, this project is about one thing: jobs and the economy. When we met Minister Foster earlier as part of our lobbying, her final comment was, "If it is good for Northern Ireland, then I am for it." What a difference an investment of over £20 million would make to south Down.

Construction is a target sector for job creation, and everyone is aware of the Construction Employers Federation multiplier: that every £1 invested creates a payback of £2.84 to the economy. This is a win-win situation for construction, hospitality and the retail sector in south Down and further afield.

Anyone who fears the amount of the EU spending on the project will be pleased to learn that, almost three years ago, prior to the approvals being granted, a Newry businessman, Mr Colm Meehan, indicated his commitment that, should the Narrow Water bridge project proceed, he was prepared to invest £25 million in developing a hotel in close proximity to the site of the new bridge. Add to that an £18 million hotel in Rostrevor and a £10 million hotel in Glassdrumman. Those hotels will provide construction jobs and, when opened, the staff will be recruited in the south Down and Omeath/Carlingford area.

Europe will also be pleased to learn that its €17.4 million investment will not only be matched but added to with an extra 43% of local money by Mr Meehan, whom I compliment for his initiative. I am certain that many other businesses will be willing to invest in the region as the project develops. Other entrepreneurs such as Gordon Coulter, Sam Hamilton, Malachy McCourt, Liam Murphy

and William James Smith, to name but a few, have already shown their commitment or are poised to do so.

The Warrenpoint Harbour Authority is poised to welcome its first cruise ship, and hopefully the marina will be the next port. Chambers of commerce right around the coast; towns and villages such as Newry, Warrenpoint, Burren, Rostrevor, Kilkeel, Newcastle and Downpatrick; organisations and businesses such as the Kilkeel cookery school, Kilkeel Development Association, Rathfriland regeneration and Castlewellan regeneration; the caravan parks; our retailers; our farmers; and above all our construction industry need this to happen.

The bridge is vital to unlocking the tourism potential of south Down. One does not have to go too far to see how Carlingford and the Cooley peninsula have been transformed as a tourist destination over the past 10 years. This project will become not only the gateway to south Down, Brontë country, Mourne country or St Patrick's country but to Northern Ireland.

Last year, the Republic increased its tourist traffic while we are still lagging behind. I believe that the bridge, which would be just over an hour from Dublin Airport, would provide that vital link. Get people into south Down and then move them around Northern Ireland.

The bridge will become a focal point. From Downpatrick to the Boyne valley, there is much to attract visitors. There is tourism potential from Finn McCool to Cú Chulainn and from the Táin to the majestic Mournes. The bridge will be a new beginning. It will put our region on the tourist map and, in doing so, sustain existing jobs and create many new jobs that are essential to kick-starting our economy.

There is a strong enterprise culture here that is only matched by good-natured, friendly people who are well capable of maximising this golden opportunity.

In Karen's contribution, she pointed out that our Programme for Government, in line with economic proposals —

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. He mentioned the Programme for Government. I am sure that he is aware that the Government commitment is to process new article 31 applications in six months. That is precisely what happened in Narrow Water, and it will probably happen again in other article 31 applications. Is it not strange that the Minister who voted for that is now objecting to it?

Mr Rogers: Thank you for that. Mrs McKeivitt said that our Programme for Government, in line with economic proposals, puts a major focus on job creation and the potential for tourism. We have Titanic Belfast, the Causeway centre and the City of Culture in Derry. Look at the minimal figure that the Executive would have to contribute, compared with what it had to contribute for those aforementioned projects.

This project was conceived 40 years ago. Negotiating this magnificent gift to the local communities required a lot of research, time and effort by both Governments, Louth County Council, Newry and Mourne District Council, the East Border Region, INTERREG and the SEUPB, but, most importantly, as Chris Hazzard said, it had cross-community support.

In his contribution, Dominic said that he sees the bridge as a good news story for Ireland, North and South, and one that will enhance our standing internationally.

William Irwin accepted Mrs Kelly's point and talked quite a bit about the southern relief road. This project could reduce some of the congestion in Newry.

John McCallister said that he is quite happy to support the project if it makes a valuable contribution to tourist traffic.

Chris Hazzard talked about community support for the bridge and the tourist potential, and he said that it would be a catalyst for economic recovery. He also talked about the lack of beds and the road infrastructure. As I outlined, people are ready to address the lack of beds.

Trevor Lunn said that people should embrace the project. He drew my attention to the £6.4 million investment in the Mourne, and Minister Foster and Minister Kennedy were there when improvements to the Silent Valley were opened up.

David McIlveen was not burning with desire, but he was not burning with opposition. He liked the ice cream in the Genoa, but I suggest that he have a look at the ice cream in Carlingford. It is buzzing.

Cathal Boylan spoke about the opportunity to create jobs. We have a good tourist product, and I was a bit surprised to get so much support from an Armagh man, but I remembered that the bridge would be quite close to the Armagh border.

I come to the Minister. I was disappointed but did not expect to hear anything new. He kept saying, "Can this be delivered?" Well, you are the man in that position. I welcome that you will not make a prejudgement.

I thank everybody for their contribution and the Business Committee for selecting the motion for debate. Mr Deputy Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, we have lost a generation to emigration, but the next generation will judge us very harshly if this Assembly does not make this bridge a reality and does not do it soon. I urge everyone in the Chamber to support the motion and begin to kick-start our economy. Now is our time, and our place is Narrow Water.

5.00 pm

Question put.

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 47; Noes 38.

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCreagh, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKevitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr McDevitt

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCreagh, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly recognises the significant social and economic benefits, particularly for tourism, that will flow from the proposed Narrow Water bridge project in south Down; notes that the project has obtained planning consent on both sides of the border; welcomes the support of the Irish Government for the project and the Special EU Programmes Body's decision to allocate very substantial funding for the bridge; calls on the Executive to make explicit their support for the project; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make clear his commitment to the successful delivery of the Narrow Water bridge project and to take the lead, along with his counterparts in the Irish Government, in ensuring that any remaining finance required to complete the funding package is committed immediately.

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

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Mental Health Services: Omagh

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes in which to respond. All other Members who wish to speak will have seven to eight minutes.

Mr Buchanan: I thank the Business Committee for selecting the topic for debate in the House. I also thank the Minister for giving of his time to listen and respond to the debate.

In West Tyrone, and Omagh in particular, health services have never been far from the hearts of the people. We saw that clearly demonstrated in the discussions about, and final determination of, the location of the new acute hospital for the south-west in Enniskillen. That was a difficult time for the people of Omagh and County Tyrone, who felt that the largest rural county in Northern Ireland had been stripped of its life-saving acute services, placing them in a vulnerable position.

It was painful to watch the excellent services that had been built up at the Tyrone County Hospital being moved to the South West Acute Hospital. It was a time of anxiety, and it was a very trying and, indeed, tearful time for many staff, patients and others. However, the face of the health service changes and things move on.

At that time, we were given a commitment by the then Health Minister, Mr Shaun Woodward. I had many meetings and debates with Mr Woodward, and he said, "Look, I did not get you the acute hospital in Omagh but what I did get you was a local enhanced hospital, which alongside it will have a new healthcare centre and a new acute centre for mental health." The facilities that were to be in that acute centre were outlined: mental health facilities; an acute adult mental health ward; psychiatric intensive care; an acute mental health ward for older people; a challenging behaviour unit for the under-65s and the same for over-65s; an addiction treatment unit; psychosexual services; and mental health day services.

5.15 pm

Not only did Mr Woodward give that commitment, but the previous Health Minister, Mr McGimpsey, further strengthened it on several occasions. From various press statements and Hansard reports, I know that he continually referred to the commitment to delivering and providing that centre in Omagh. Most recently, on 5 October 2011, when my colleague the Health Minister, Edwin Poots, was down in Omagh, he took the initiative to release the money for the first phase of the local enhanced hospital. He advised that phase 2 would include the mental health unit at a cost of £23 million and an ambulance station and back-office accommodation at £13 million. All that was on his and his Department's agenda. So, we have a threefold commitment from three different Health Ministers to the new local enhanced hospital in Omagh, which takes in the

mental health unit and the other services. There is an old proverb that says that a threefold cord is not easily broken. I hope that that threefold commitment is not easily broken but held on to.

Recommendations arising from the 'Transforming Your Care' consultation document have caused further concern and anxiety about the delivery of the acute mental health facility at Omagh. We believe that the arguments that are used for its relocation to the South West Acute Hospital site do not stack up. Those arguments have been made without any robust rationale or evidence for such a relocation. 'Transforming Your Care' recommends that acute mental health services be located beside or in close proximity to an acute hospital. However, since 2009, when the acute medical services were removed from the Tyrone County Hospital, the acute mental health services continue to be delivered at the Tyrone and Fermanagh hospital to safe and effective standards. Indeed, when the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) approved the original business case, which included the acute adult mental health with psychiatric intensive care and acute mental health for older people, those services were deemed suitable for inclusion at the enhanced local hospital at Omagh. That happened with the clear understanding at that time that the new hospital would not include acute medical care. Therefore, we have to ask: what has changed between then and now? We are getting some recommendations and proposals that say that acute mental health services cannot be sited unless they are beside somewhere that has acute medical services. The rationale behind de-stigmatising mental health by integrating it into an acute hospital setting is very weak, and it fails to convince anyone that real thought was given to the matter.

The proposed co-location of mental health services from Omagh serves only to undermine the future delivery and viability of other mental health services in Omagh, such as older people's mental health and addiction services. Such diminution of services is constantly undermining the feasibility and sustainability of the entire new enhanced hospital project in Omagh, which the Health Department and the Western Health and Social Care Trust have always referred to as the third leg of the clinical network stool that is required to ensure the Western Trust's full delivery of services in that area. Any proposed co-location to the South West Acute Hospital would also require a newbuild, as the facility currently cannot provide the accommodation that is required for effective mental health service delivery. We all know that, being a PPI project, the cost of such a newbuild would far exceed that of building the mental health facility in Omagh, as set out in the original business case as part of the project delivery. Therefore, there is no appetite in Omagh or among the providers of mental health services in Omagh for the facility's relocation to the South West Acute Hospital site or to anywhere other than Omagh.

In April this year, in a press statement, as well as in recent meetings since then, the Western Trust affirmed that Omagh was its preferred location for the acute mental health beds. Clinicians have also spoken of their support for remaining at Omagh. Therefore, I believe that it would be a detrimental step to relocate the service to anywhere other than the new hospital in Omagh. The people of Omagh and west Tyrone have sacrificed much by very reluctantly accepting the removal of their acute services

and hospital. At that time, a line was drawn in the sand to say: enough, and no more. Any relocation of mental health services would be a further injustice and, I believe, a step too far. Therefore, Minister, I trust that the voice of the Western Health and Social Care Trust clinicians, the health professionals and the people will prevail and be taken into account as you seek to decide on the matter in future days.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, as an seans labhairt inniu sa díospóireacht seo. I thank the Minister for attending the Adjournment debate. I appreciate that very much. I commend Tom Buchanan for tabling the motion. I had the very same thought, and had tabled a request for this debate, which may have happened sequentially next Tuesday. No harm in Tom getting there first. I very much support what he is trying to achieve.

I want to express my serious concern at proposals contained in 'Transforming Your Care' regarding the future of acute mental health services in Omagh. I know that the Minister will say that it is a more general regional thing that is being taken forward, but we in Omagh have particular cause for concern. The proposals have caused considerable anxiety in the area, perhaps exemplified by the headline in the 'Tyrone Herald' on Monday 16 October, on the controversial proposal to remove Tyrone and Fermanagh facilities:

"Axe looms on acute mental health care".

This discussion, or debate, dominated a meeting called by the Patient and Client Council in the Tara Centre in Omagh on Wednesday 7 November. In fairness to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB), and our health authorities generally, a very strong team was put forward on the evening to address the issue and listen to people's concerns. The meeting included the presence of Mr John Compton, which was appreciated. That single issue dominated the meeting. It became clear that evening, and since, that the Health and Social Care Board has one view on the matter and the key provider of health services in our area, the Western Trust, has an entirely different view on the future provision of acute psychiatric care and mental health services in our area. That divergence is worth noting.

I have in my possession a copy of the 'Mental Health Acute Care Review April 2012', a document that was submitted, as I understand it, by the Western Health and Social Care Trust to the Department for its consideration. It might be the case that the trust is an elevated consultee in a matter such as this, but I do think that the view of the trust needs to be taken very, very seriously in this debate. Mr Buchanan mentioned the local enhanced hospital. The trust's document mentions, on page 7, an overemphasis on a medical model. The trust says that it really is more important to integrate mental health inpatient care with the community it serves, rather than with medicine. That thinking emanates from the Department of Health itself, in 1994. Therefore, I think that the argument for co-location with an acute hospital is being overstated; for what purpose, I am not sure.

A look at the bulk of the population shows what everyone knows: Omagh is the populated place. The district has more than 50,000 people, and the town has 25,000. If mental health services were integrated with the community that they serve, they would not be moving away from Omagh at all.

Nobody seems to buy the argument that the idea behind co-locating mental health and acute health services is about ending stigma. In fact, other esteemed people involved in health politics say that the current arrangement, where there is lots of accommodation and gardens for healing, and so on, at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, involve no stigma whatsoever. Indeed, Professor Pat D'Arcy explained to me privately that he thought that that argument was very outdated.

There is, of course, strong professional nursing experience in Omagh at this time; a tradition that I think is over 100 years old. Were mental health services to be relocated away from Omagh and into Enniskillen, there would be a problem with accommodation at the new hospital. The accommodation needed is not there. It would involve making a commitment to a newbuild, and I am sure that the Department of Health does not want to undertake a newbuild commitment because the accommodation is not there.

I emphasise again that Bamford said that acute inpatient mental health services should be provided as part of an integrated model of crisis facilities, with locally accessible units. I think that the local enhanced hospital is the model that can best serve that purpose. If there is a reason other than health — if there is a political reason for this — somebody should say so, because people who are analysing this do not get, absorb or understand the argument being made for mental health services to be taken out of Omagh. The evidence is not there. The case is not being made. The only campaigner for this is the Health and Social Care Board, because the community in Fermanagh or anywhere else are not. It is not necessary to take the service away. I think that it is acting in bad faith. The Omagh community needs confidence building, and the Western Health and Social Care Trust has worked very hard, as has the Department of Health, at building confidence with the Omagh community following the loss of acute health services. No agenda is served by taking this proposal forward in the context of Omagh.

Mr Hussey: I thank Councillor Buchanan for bringing this matter to the attention of the House. I also thank the Minister for being present. I declare an interest in that my late father was a psychiatric nurse based in the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh, and I still have relations who work in the field of mental health. I also put on record my praise for our hard-working mental health staff in Omagh; their professionalism is second to none.

In Omagh, we have a feeling that if cuts are to be made to health resources, whether everyday or mental health services, we are seen as the prime target. We find the Compton review perhaps the most galling of all, when one considers that John Compton was for a time the chief executive of the Sperrin Lakeland Trust and is well aware of how Omagh people feel about healthcare. Today, mental health is the specific issue. So I begin by referring to a letter submitted to one of our local papers by Andy McKane of UNISON:

"The people of Omagh district must avail of the opportunity to submit consultations in response to the 'Transforming Your Care' proposal. The document has proposed to remove psychiatric admissions, currently in the Tyrone & Fermanagh Hospital, and relocate them to the South Western Acute Hospital. This is a

U-turn on the promise given by Michael McGimpsey when he was Health Minister and brings into doubt the second phase of the new hospital promised at the Tyrone and Fermanagh site.

The reasons cited in the proposal are to reduce stigma and have the facility beside an acute hospital. Reasons which were not considered important when removing acute hospital status from the Tyrone County Hospital in 2009, when health officials stated that adequate provision would be put in place for the people of Tyrone. If these provisions can service the population in the local area, surely they can also service the local 26-bed psychiatric unit.

Unison is encouraged by the cross-party support of Omagh District Council and heartened by the commitment of the Western Trust to maintain services in Omagh. This is a very worrying time for the people of the Omagh area who have seen service stripped from county town and relocated to Enniskillen and Altnagelvin. There is also concern about the future of palliative care in Tyrone County Hospital and long-stay beds in Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital."

5.30 pm

Omagh District Council is also opposed to the proposed changes on a cross-party basis and stated in a letter to the chair of the trust on 31 October 2012:

"At both the Joint Liaison Group meeting of 23rd October 2012 and the Council's Health Care Committee of 30th October 2012, Members voiced their concerns with the proposals outlined, and, in particular with the proposal to relocate acute mental health to the new South West Acute Hospital and the total omission of the integral role of the new enhanced local hospital in Omagh will play in the future delivery of health care provision.

At the Joint Liaison Group meeting Trust Officials were in agreement with Members that the consultation document neither provides a rationale nor evidence to justify a decision to relocate acute mental health services near an acute hospital and in fact undermines the future delivery of other mental health services in Omagh such as older persons mental health and addiction services. Additionally Officials highlighted that such relocation would require a new build at the South West Acute Hospital given that the current hospital could not provide the accommodation required for effective mental health service delivery. It was also noted that as the South West Acute Hospital is a PFI project, the exorbitant costs of providing a new build is most certainly not in keeping with the underlying cost cutting requirements of the Transforming Your Care proposals.

It is also important to note that since the removal of acute services from the Tyrone County Hospital in 2009 acute mental health services have continued to be safely and appropriately delivered at the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, in addition, the Trust's own affirmation in April of this year that Omagh is its preferred location for the retention of acute mental health beds confirms the Trust's confidence that the

service continues to be safe and meeting the needs of the population of the West."

Mr Buchanan referred to some of the meetings that we had about the hospital in Omagh. In fact, when I first got elected to Omagh District Council, it was one of the major issues that we were all involved in. It was, as Mr McElduff told me at the time, team West Tyrone. West Tyrone MLAs of all political shades united in opposition to the removal of health services from Omagh, and here we are again today.

When the Western Trust was established, we had major difficulties in the Omagh area with establishing any trust with the trust. It is not often that I praise the Western Health and Social Care Trust, but, on this occasion, it and Omagh District Council speak with one voice. We cannot allow any further removal of services from Omagh. John Compton has got this badly wrong, and Omagh says no to any attempt to remove acute mental health services from the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital in Omagh. We as politicians from the local area are united on that. Omagh District Council is united. The Western Health and Social Care Trust is united, and the staff of the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital — the most important people involved in the issue — are with us.

Patients must be given the respect that they deserve. The staff must be given the respect that they deserve. The services are safely provided in Omagh. Every opportunity was taken to remove services from Omagh by using the magic word "safety". There is no question of safety in this document. Omagh says no, and we say it with one loud voice here this evening. Acute mental health services cannot be removed from Omagh.

Mr Byrne: I, like others, want to thank Tom Buchanan for bringing the topic to the House. I thank the Minister for being in attendance and also for having a private meeting with Tom and me some weeks ago. Some 25 years ago, Omagh had three hospitals: the Omagh General Hospital; the Tyrone County Hospital; and the Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital, which had over 100 years of established practice and good delivery of mental health services.

Unfortunately, again, as Mr Hussey said, the people of Omagh have to fight to retain their services, particularly the health service. Omagh was promised an enhanced local hospital complex that would present a new model for local healthcare delivery. It was to consist of three elements: the Omagh hospital with a range of services, an Omagh health and care centre — essentially a GP centre — and a centre for mental health with a full range of related services.

The mental health centre was being designed to create a holistic healing environment that would lead to the modernisation and enhancement of current mental health practice. This falls, as Mr McElduff said, into the Bamford review of mental health and learning disability. According to the website www.newhospitals.westerntrust.hscni.net, the centre for mental health is to have approximately 100 beds and provide acute mental health services for the adult population in the south-west of Northern Ireland. It is also to offer psychiatric intensive care facilities for those with challenging behaviours and an addiction treatment unit. It is fair to say that Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital has built up an excellent expertise in addiction treatments over the past 30 years. Nowhere in the information on that website does it state that the service needs to be beside

an acute hospital. This service was planned knowing the situation with acute services in Omagh.

The 'Transforming Your Care' report puts the emphasis on those with mental health problems being cared for in the community. Emphasis is put on carers and their role in helping and supporting the mental health patient. If that is the case, it is disturbing that the report then advocates that those people will now have to be taken out of an environment in which they have some continuity with carers and put into an environment that will not meet those needs. That seems to be a contradiction.

Omagh has been a centre for mental health care for well over 100 years. In fact, it was the site of a teaching hospital for the western area. There is much expertise among nursing and medical staff in the Omagh area and a ready availability of well-educated and trained staff who have kept the services to the forefront through challenging times. Some people with mental health issues have difficulties with addiction, and, as I said, the staff in Omagh have an excellent track record and expertise in that field.

Mental health has been the Cinderella of the health service for many years. People with mental health issues should be treated as equal to any other person with a physical illness and have the treatment that is best for them, as opposed to what is seen as a financial decision.

In a question for written answer on 16 October 2012, I asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his position on the provision of a modern mental health unit at the proposed new hospital in Omagh. In his reply, he said:

"No decisions have been taken yet and the Health and Social Care Board is seeking views and comments on the proposals contained in the document to inform the way forward."

I accept the Minister's integrity, but I am not so sure about officials in his Department or the Health and Social Care Board.

Public confidence in Omagh, west Tyrone and County Tyrone as a whole has been badly dented in the past by the way in which government has treated us, particularly in relation to health. Those of us who preached acceptance of the local enhanced hospital were pilloried at the time, but we felt that it was better to get half a loaf than no bread. This issue is one of public confidence, and the Executive must stand by the promises that they made to our people. The 'Transforming Your Care' document is bizarre, with its inherent contradictions as to whether a modern mental health unit needs to have acute services alongside it. That is not proven anywhere, nor is there medical evidence to support it. That begs the question: what is the game?

I support all that has been said. I hope that the Minister can give us some comfort in the days and weeks ahead.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am grateful for the opportunity to hear the views of the Members on this issue. As Health Minister, my vision is to ensure that the services from health and social care providers meet the needs of patients, clients and local communities.

I recognise that some people are anxious and concerned about the future of our services, especially in the present

financial climate. I understand and share that concern, but with strong leadership, involving people, and effective planning, I believe that the challenges we face can be met.

The Bamford review of mental health and learning disability recommends that people with a mental illness should be treated at home in the community unless there is a clinical reason not to do so. Admission to hospital should only occur when people become acutely ill and no other options are appropriate. At the same time, Bamford recognised that hospitals were not appropriate places for people to live once their treatment was complete and recommended that all long-stay patients should be resettled into more appropriate accommodation in the community.

Transforming Your Care (TYC) supports the Bamford vision for the treatment and care of people who are mentally ill. Under Transforming Your Care, my aim is to provide a full range of health and social care services outside and beyond the acute sector, in the community, thus supporting an increasing number of people to live independently, preferably in their own homes, for longer, promoting good health and reducing unnecessary hospitalisation.

I want to challenge the traditional emphasis on hospital care, especially long-stay institutional care. One of Transforming Your Care's key proposals is to reduce the number of inpatient beds and the number of people living in institutional care. This will be done only by developing alternative community-based services.

One of my key objectives is to develop an enhanced role for primary and community care, working hand in hand with healthcare providers and patients, in designing and delivering consistently high quality, safe and needs-based care in community settings.

I believe that truly high-quality health and social care services can be achieved only when properly resourced and designed around the needs of the people who use them. We need to use limited resources wisely, identifying savings for reinvestment in modern, efficient services.

Unfortunately, the financial position in the health and social care sector is significantly constrained, and I am actively looking at alternative funding options to allow for the delivery of this modern healthcare model across the Province.

Patients are entitled to receive the right care in the right place at the right time. They are at the centre of my policies and priorities. The design and delivery of services that meet their needs and expectations is what really matters to patients. Community care improves the quality of life for patients and may release valuable resources to further enhance community services.

Transforming Your Care proposes changes to the way in which health services are delivered in local communities. The need to provide the right care in the right place at the right time is a key principle of the change.

One of the proposals is to develop six inpatient mental health units in Northern Ireland, two of which will be in the Western Trust area. The document makes the point that, to reduce stigma and ensure there is good access to acute care, it is necessary to locate mental health hospitals close to acute hospital provision, recognising that this may not be possible in all circumstances. However, this proposal,

like all the proposals, is subject to a public consultation exercise, and no decisions have yet been taken. The public consultation will enable the public and all key stakeholders to contribute their views to the future design and configuration of services.

The decision on the exact location can be finalised only when the business case has been developed. The business case will look at the site options and costs and will be used to determine the most appropriate option as regards location, value for money and service need.

When I met Omagh District Council in October 2011, I confirmed that service provision would not change until new service provision had been established. I also advised that the proposed phase 2 of the Omagh hospital project would have to be in line with Bamford and the outworkings of the review of acute inpatient mental health provision across Northern Ireland.

We can already see the impact of better community mental health services. Home treatment teams are reducing the need for people to go into psychiatric hospitals, and when people do need inpatient care, they can be discharged more quickly because we have the necessary support services in the community.

Following the publication of 'Transforming Your Care' in December 2011, draft population plans have been produced by local commissioning groups in liaison with the health and social care trusts and others together with an overarching strategic implementation plan. The draft plans provide a basis to take forward a number of TYC proposals, particularly in respect of service configuration and the shift of services from secondary care to primary and community care.

5.45 pm

The draft plans were subject to quality assurance work over the summer, and that work is being concluded. This is a critical process involving input from a range of stakeholders. It will ensure that the draft population plans and strategic implementation plan provide a sound basis for how our Health and Social Care services will be delivered in future.

As I said, any decisions on the future configuration and provision of services will be informed by the ongoing consultation exercise, which is supported by a wide range of engagement events, allowing patients, service users and the wider public to have their say. Specific proposals will also be subject to the business case process and further consultation before any final decision is made.

As outlined earlier, my overall aim is to bring about change in our Health and Social Care system and deliver better prevention and early intervention so that care is more patient-centred, is provided closer to home, is resilient and safe, and delivers the best possible outcomes well into the future to meet the needs of the citizens of Northern Ireland. I am strongly committed to the principle that Health and Social Care services should be driven by, and responsive to, the needs of patients, clients and their carers.

My vision for the future of Health and Social Care is one in which we drive up the quality of services, improve outcomes and enhance the patient experience. I want to ensure that service users are at the heart of everything that we do. Therefore, I am happy to give full consideration

to all the various issues that will arise when it comes to providing psychiatric care and help in the south-west area. We will take full cognisance of what the Health and Social Care Board and the Western Trust have to say. We will also pay attention to the community's wishes.

All of this will be taken in conjunction with the costs, and so forth, associated with any newbuild and the development of any such facility. I can assure the House that this matter is still in play, irrespective of what TYC says on it. We have a lot of other issues to take into account over and above that report.

Adjourned at 5.47 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 December 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Recent Unrest

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow up to 80 minutes for the debate. The proposer will have 10 minutes to propose the motion and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members will have up to seven minutes. There will be only one round of Members speaking. When that has been completed, I will put the Question.

Mr M McGuinness (The deputy First Minister): I beg to move

That this Assembly unequivocally condemns the rioting and the campaign of intimidation, harassment and violent attacks on elected representatives following the decision of Belfast City Council in relation to the flying of the Union flag; expresses its sympathy to all those who have been attacked, injured or threatened with attack in recent days, including police officers, elected representatives and their staff; reaffirms the absolute and unconditional commitment of all its Members to respecting and upholding the rule of law and the pursuit of their political objectives by purely legal and political means; and insists that any further protests be peaceful, orderly and organised in accordance with the law.

Go raibh maith agat. Mr Speaker, I want to begin by thanking you and the Business Committee for facilitating, at the request of the First Minister and me, this opportunity to enable our Assembly to play its part in bringing a much needed sense of calm, reason and peace in the aftermath of the madness of last week.

Let me open the debate by emphasising the role that we, as political leaders, have to play in ensuring that our words and deeds are not misrepresented or, indeed, left open to misinterpretation. We, as the elected representatives of the people, must recognise that we have a responsibility to be clear in our message of condemnation of the recent lawlessness and violence on the streets, attacks on and intimidation of elected representatives, and attacks on council staff and police officers. That is utterly unacceptable and must be condemned in the strongest possible terms.

I am, however, optimistic that our message today condemning the violence and supporting those who have been attacked and intimidated will be heard loud and clear beyond the halls of Parliament Buildings. I am encouraged that the joint motion from the First Minister and me is

supported by the five main parties, and I urge all others to support it and condemn the recent unrest and disgraceful attacks on elected representatives, police officers and Belfast City Council staff.

The peace process that we have collectively constructed is admired throughout the world. We have had tensions and difficulties in that process, as we have had in the past week, but we must remain resolute and not allow the recent events to undermine the agreements that we have made over the past number of years. We have a collective responsibility to give leadership at all times, and particularly at times such as this. Leadership is being shown by the parties in supporting the motion, and that leadership must continue beyond today and into the communities that look to their elected representatives for direction.

The arson attack on Stewart Dickson's constituency office in Carrickfergus, the cowardly attack on the home of Alliance Party councillors Michael and Christine Bower and their 17-month-old baby in Bangor, the attempted arson attack on Executive Minister Stephen Farry's constituency office and the attack on the house of Alliance Party councillor Linda Cleland in Newtownards, along with other attacks on Alliance Party offices, are reprehensible, and I condemn them in the strongest possible terms. The violence and intimidation directed at the Alliance Party is totally unacceptable, and we must all stand behind that message. The intimidation and threats against MP Naomi Long, Councillor Laura McNamee, Councillor Jim McVeigh and Gerry Kelly MLA this week are the work of those who refuse to accept democracy, and those elements that issued the threats should lift them immediately.

Let me also say that the attacks on the Church of Ireland in Glenavy and the home of DUP councillor Samuel Brush in Tyrone over the weekend are equally unacceptable and must be forthrightly condemned by all political representatives. In Derry, a lethal explosive device was uncovered by the police, and I want to express my thanks to our police service, because its timely intervention no doubt thwarted an attack on our community that would have caused injury and death. Anti-peace process extremists, using republicanism as a flag of convenience, continue to represent a threat to life, and their actions must also be forthrightly condemned. The violence on the streets over the past week has been orchestrated, and both the UVF and UDA have been involved. That raises many serious questions about the future intentions of those who once professed to support the peace process.

There can be no excuses for the street violence that has left 28 police officers injured, Belfast City Council

staff injured, and drivers of cars and buses intimidated and threatened. There can be no ifs or buts: it must be condemned, plain and simple. I hope that all the contributions today will make that clear, so as not to leave any doubt for those who are listening to every word that political leaders say. As we have done before, we must unite, so as not to allow those who wish to drag us back to the past take advantage of less than clear condemnation of the recent unrest.

We must also challenge ourselves to be proactive in the pursuit of the principle of mutual respect and recognise that we live in a culturally diverse society. As United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said during her visit this week, democracy requires dialogue, compromise and constant commitment by everyone to protect the rights of everyone. We must ensure that we protect the rights of political representatives at this time to make decisions without any threat, implied or otherwise, hanging in the air.

The street violence over the past week has been witnessed by a global audience, as it has been reported across the world. In a time of economic recession and pressure on our traders, the violence has resulted only in making it more difficult to attract investment, jobs and tourists and has badly damaged the prospects of many traders in the crucial Christmas period. As the world was watching, the damage to our reputation and prospects will be difficult to repair, but repair it we must. We must rise to the challenge that this has thrown down and work harder to cement community relations and tackle sectarianism and intolerance among our community.

Political parties must play a central part in healing divisions, not raising tensions. We must recognise that we live in a society in which there are different allegiances. We must work for mutual respect for Britishness and Irishness, which should not be an obstacle to harmony in our community. We must also focus on our young people. It really is an indictment on our society that children as young as 12 have been charged in relation to the recent violence. We must give hope to those communities on all sides who feel marginalised and disadvantaged. No one section of our community has a monopoly on marginalisation, disadvantage or economic hardship. We must focus on delivering a better life for all of our people and helping those who are hardest hit by the economic situation, whether they define themselves as British or Irish.

Collectively, we must all strive for new ideas to develop new thinking on how best we build our future together. We need a vision for our society that does not involve a victory over each other. We need to build a better future, a future together in a united community, and let the message that we send out today be one that will offer hope to those communities and not one of political points scoring.

We must dampen the tensions that have been ignited over recent days and not seek, by word or deed, to raise tensions. We must rise above all of that, and we must offer real leadership; leadership that gives our communities confidence in the political process. We must never allow those who want to destroy the political process to succeed.

We are not going back, and that is the message that must be heard loud and clear from the Assembly today. I call on all of the Members to support the motion.

Mr Nesbitt: The Ulster Unionist Party unreservedly supports the motion and joins the deputy First Minister in

condemning all attacks, as he detailed. During the week, we actively sought out opportunities to call for an end to the illegality and, further, to argue that what was needed was a strategy rather than a knee-jerk reaction; for brains rather than brawn.

Anyone who attacks a police officer, an elected politician or an individual, or who engages in illegal activity on our streets, fails to understand the values that encapsulate the Union flag. In doing what they did, the rioters lost the very argument that they were trying to promote. The flag, to me, stands for a society that is progressive and pluralist, a society in which Mo — short for Mohamed — Farah, born in Somalia, wraps himself in that Union flag to celebrate his contribution to a fantastic Olympic Games for the United Kingdom. That is a glimpse of what the flag means to me. It should not be abused, and it was abused this week by those who used it as an excuse for criminality. The people who took part in the riots did so on what they and I would describe as the Queen's highway. That is an appropriate place for peaceful protest but nothing more — nothing more. Anything more is an abuse of the Queen's highway, with all of the implications that flow from that.

As I said, I condemn the attacks on elected representatives of this House, on their constituency offices and on other elected representatives, their staff, their homes and their property, including the attack on the Ards councillor, who is a professional neighbour of mine in South Street in Newtownards. The Ulster Unionist Party has lost many elected representatives to terrorist murder, including Senators in the old Stormont, Members of Parliament, members of earlier iterations that paved the way for this Assembly and councillors and, of course, we lost our old party headquarters in Glengall Street. This party has paid too high a price, especially in human terms, to condone or in any way incite violence.

10.45 am

So let me repeat: we condemn utterly what happened last week. That is the easy part; the challenge for every party in the House is how to acknowledge what last week was all about. On one level, there was a democratic vote at Belfast City Council to stop flying the flag except on a very few days of the year. It was a democratic vote, and we accept that as democrats. On another level, it has been received as part of a process described by some as a party political victory, which, of course, suggests winners and losers. I sense very clearly that some of those who took to the streets last week saw themselves as the losers, not for the first time; indeed, far from the first time. These are uncomfortable truths. People might be a little more comfortable if, for example, Newry council had not endorsed the controversial naming of a play park.

The peace process promised many things, but chief among them were economic and political benefits. Economically, I remember reporting many times as a journalist the promise of a peace dividend. Do the people feel that they got a peace dividend? No. What they got was a double-dip recession, just like everyone else. They were promised a political settlement that put the constitutional question to bed, but do they feel that that is what has happened? No. Rightly or wrongly, they perceive that their Britishness is under constant and continuous attack. One way that unionist anger was expressed last week was by the burning of the flag of the Republic of Ireland outside

Belfast City Hall. I condemn that act. This is not about oppressing others; it is about reassuring those who feel oppressed.

The issue for the Assembly is simple: we must stop this piecemeal attitude to the fundamental problems that add up to the unresolved legacy of the Troubles. The Ulster Unionist Party says that this is the time and, indeed, the opportunity to tackle the poison that remains after 40 years of death and destruction. Let us recognise that sectarianism remains largely unaddressed and lingers as the toxic waste of the conflict. Let us commit to the big legacy issues of dealing with the past and building a truly shared future.

This party was first through the door when the former Secretary of State, Owen Paterson, called for bilateral talks on dealing with the past. We went on to publish our own position paper on the issue. It was not a policy paper or a road map, because we recognise that no one party can or should take sole ownership of that process. The Ulster Unionist Party has also engaged directly with Sinn Féin's initiative on reconciliation and, although we cannot support its current proposals, we have committed to the need for a process of reconciliation. Many years ago, we also brought forward our own ideas on a shared future.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: No, I will not give way.

It is time for the House to be honest with itself and the people of Northern Ireland — honest and bold. We need to acknowledge that some issues will take many years to sort out. So let us begin. Let us say, for example, that we will set a new basic standard of numeracy and literacy for schoolchildren and reach it within five years. Let us commit to a single education system, one that is no threat to Catholics and Roman Catholicism. We will do it in 10, 15 or 20 years. Leave the detail for later, but let us commit to a principle because it is the right thing to do. In short, let us commit, like a good builder does after handing over the keys to a new house, to return to address the snag list of devolved government, but let us also accept that that snag list includes fundamental flaws that must be addressed urgently.

Dr McDonnell: It is very much in sorrow that I rise to support the motion. We are unanimous in our condemnation of the horrible violence that has been directed primarily against our democratic institutions and our elected representatives. In turn, it flowed from there against police and council staff. For me, polite condemnation is not just enough: we, in the Assembly, are responsible for removing the reasons for such violence. When I stood with Stewart Dickson at the front of the burned-out shell of his office in Carrickfergus, I could not, in all honesty, say that we have been very effective in performing that task. We must do more — a lot more — than just condemn, and we must tell the truth, however difficult that might be.

The founding document of this Assembly states that we are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of our relationships in Northern Ireland. The fact is that the campaign of intimidation started quite a bit of time before the violence erupted, and that campaign must be condemned. Mutual respect requires that there should be no campaigns to coerce or erode anyone's feelings of Britishness or Irishness. Our founding

document recognises the birthright of all our people to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British or both. It is not for anyone or any party here to describe anyone else's identity or tell them that this or that is the dominant flag or symbol that they must accept, because that is just not true. There is no flag of the country that is accepted as such by all our people. We are all signed up to an agreement that, in effect, states that we cannot force any section of our people to accept a flag of our choice. That is the basis and the only basis on which we can sort this problem out. There can be no cherry-picking. We cannot pick the bit of the Good Friday Agreement that says that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom and overlook the bit that stipulates the mutual respect for Britishness and Irishness. *[Interruption.]* Mr Speaker, I find it difficult with the amount of nonsense. Would it be possible —

Mr Speaker: Order. The motion is very specific. I am allowing party leaders, especially, some latitude. I remind all Members that the motion is absolutely clear.

Dr McDonnell: We need to condemn the mindset that says that identities and loyalties can be forced on people. We need to condemn the anti-democratic mindset that says that Belfast City Council somehow or other had no right to take the decision that it did. In the past, systematic erosion of Irish identity was the explicit policy of the old unionist regime. Today, rights to British or Irish identity are equal in all respects. They have nothing to do with our current constitutional arrangement; they are very separate. My right to my Irish identity is guaranteed by the British Government, just as the right to a British identity —

Mr Speaker: Order. I am trying, as far as possible, to give Members some latitude in and around this, but I ask Members to come back, as far as possible, to the motion. The motion is quite specific. I say to Dr McDonnell in all honesty that I think it is important that whatever is said is very much linked to the motion.

Dr McDonnell: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I am simply trying to set in all honesty the context for the violence as I see it and trying to answer some of the questions. Mr Speaker, what I am trying to say is that it is not enough to condemn, as I said at the beginning; we should challenge the mindset that portrays each and every move towards equality and fairness —

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: I have only a limited amount of time.

We must certainly condemn those who manipulate the fears and emotions that lead to this violence, however unreasonable, around the question of identity. That is where we find the roots of last week's violence. For many years, I have worked to draw attention to what I perceived to be government neglect in loyalist areas, and that has been wheeled out to us in the past week as a reason. I can accept that there is a great sense of alienation. There is neglect in areas such as educational achievement and quality of life. I want to put it on record that, in my opinion, this neglect will not be solved by bunging a few million to one paramilitary group or another. In fact, bunging money to paramilitary groups only compounds the problems, because the paramilitary groups are the biggest part of the problem.

Money must be directed to early years education, so that children achieve their full potential. Where there is substantiated marginalisation and deprivation, let us recognise it, let us confront it and let us remedy it as soon as possible. Let us remedy it in a sustainable way that ensures that it is alleviated permanently, and let us set out to ensure that no child is left behind now or in the future. However, let me be very clear: there is a chasm of difference between proper interventions to address disadvantage educationally and economically and those who exploit concerns and use violence and threats for their own advantage. We will help, where there are grounds for help, but we will not concede ground to any act of violence or any group involved in acts of violence.

We are all agreed here today that what we saw last week is not the future that we envisaged, but my worry is that it will happen again if we do not move to solve the fundamental problems. Our job is to make sure that it does not go on indefinitely by bringing forward clear programmes that generate mutual respect. I suggest that we start that in the Chamber and that we show an example to people outside.
— *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: The work for real reconciliation and a shared future has to start here without delay. If it does not, our condemnations will be hollow, and we may have to visit this space on future occasions.

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

Dr McDonnell: I want to make a final point. Sorry, Mr Speaker, I will leave it at that.

Mr Ford: The past week has been a dreadful week for Northern Ireland, so let me start by expressing my sympathy and that of my colleagues to those who have suffered. Three children had their home damaged. Grace Bower is well known — far too well known — for a 17-month-old child, and the other two live in the flat above the shop next door to what was Stewart Dickson's office. Their home was smoke damaged last Monday, and they probably will not be back in it before Christmas. People have had homes, cars and businesses destroyed or damaged by street violence or business activity disrupted in these difficult economic times, in what should have been one of the main shopping weeks of the year. Belfast City Council staff have been assaulted. I express my sympathy to Gerry Kelly MLA and to Councillor Jim McVeigh, who have received death threats, and to Councillor Sammy Brush, whose home was attacked early yesterday. All those incidents are an affront to democracy.

I especially want to recognise the role of the police over the past few days. They have faced a challenging situation on a scale that was not envisaged only a week ago. Many officers have been injured in different places. Despite that, they have played a sterling role in responding to a wide range of incidents and threats, and they deserve our thanks.

The Alliance Party has borne the brunt of the attacks and intimidation over the past few days. Colleagues have had homes and offices attacked, and others have been threatened. So let me put on the record, without repeating the details, the names of Councillor Christine Bower, Councillor Michael Bower, Councillor Linda Cleland, Stewart Dickson MLA, Stephen Farry MLA, Councillor

Laura McNamee and, of course, our MP and former colleague in this House, Naomi Long, who continues to live under a threat of death but, unsurprisingly, remains resolute, defiant and absolutely true to the values that she has brought to public life.

We have had people contacting us from literally around the world. They have told us that what they saw reminded them of the worst experiences of fascism, because the attacks and threats were not attacks on Alliance alone: they were direct attacks on democracy and on the rule of law. The people who called expressed support and solidarity for us in the attacks we have endured and for the stance we have taken.

It has been a week of contrasts: contrast between the exercise of democracy inside Belfast City Hall and the exercise of intimidation and violence outside; contrast between the actions of those who claim to be protecting the Union flag and the values of freedom and democracy that that flag stands for; contrast between the cowardice of thugs covering their faces with masks and the dignity and fortitude of elected representatives under attack; and contrast between the response when the same decision on designated days was taken by other unionist-dominated councils at other times and the effect that whipping up tensions had on this occasion.

11.00 am

There are two issues that the Assembly and our community have to face up to: where we stand on the principle of democracy; and what we will do to accommodate differing identities and allegiances in a genuinely shared future.

On the principle of democracy, I find it striking that the motion that we tabled last Thursday differed from today's in one respect only: our description of last week's decision by Belfast City Council as legitimate and democratic. It is beyond me why all parties refused to sign up to those words because any decision taken by a democratically elected body, in accordance with the law and standing orders, is democratic. Any democratic decision is, as a result, legitimate. That is the very essence of democracy.

If we refuse to accept that democratic decisions are legitimate, why bother with democracy? How do we tell the people who rioted and threatened last week that they were wrong to do so? How do we tell dissident republicans that democracy is the only route to influence our future? If democratic decisions are not legitimate, how do we stand over the principle of consent that only the people of Northern Ireland can determine their future? If you want Northern Ireland's present and future to be ruled by democracy, you have to accept that every democratic decision, including those that you perceive to affect your sense of identity, is legitimate.

Let me look now at the challenge of accommodating differing identities in a shared future. The achievement of devolution was the symbol that unionists, nationalists and those who reject both labels could live together and work together to address the issues facing our community. Along the way, there have been real moments of important change, although they were often symbolic rather than substantial. Yet, despite that, the Executive have so far failed to make the real and far-reaching progress needed towards a shared society in which sectarianism, fear and

threat belong only in the past. Every survey shows strong majority support for shared education, workplaces, leisure and housing.

We have worked successfully to find a political settlement that allows Northern Ireland to be governed from this place, but we have failed to use it to prioritise the building of a genuinely shared society. The longer we fail to do so, the more our talk of building the economy becomes unrealistic and delusional. Last week's events have shown that it can be put off no longer. An immediate priority must be to find a means to accommodate different identities through a shared approach to symbols, even if that is perceived by some to be meddling with identity.

The agreement confirmed Northern Ireland's position in the UK, for as long as the majority wish, and recognised that our diverse society is a place where people of British, Irish and both identities live together, as Dr McDonnell said.

We must find a better way of regulating the display of flags and symbols as part of cultural celebrations at a community level and find an effective mechanism for enforcing breaches of protocols and the misuse of flags. The challenge has to be to rise above the win-lose politics of them versus us to find a common, shared approach. In my view, the flag decision at Belfast City Council, like similar decisions elsewhere, is respectful of national sovereignty and of the variety of allegiances that make up our community. What was potentially most significant last Monday was seeing nationalist parties pragmatically, but positively, responding to that position. It showed that accommodation is possible if people are prepared to move beyond zero-sum approaches.

Last week was horrific and frightening. The sense that some in the House had more than a little understanding of those targeting my friends was palpable. Today, we have to turn away from that. We have to turn the moment of danger into a moment of opportunity to supply the leadership and commitment that will ensure that we build a genuinely shared future.

Mr Allister: It was a seminal moment when the Union flag was torn down from the prime civic building in our capital city. That was not an isolated assault on our Britishness, but a new high point in insult and republican action in an orchestrated process that began in the Belfast Agreement. It has touched a nerve with many people who are frustrated by a treadmill of concessions, which is just as the Belfast Agreement intended. It, of course, was and is designed to trundle us out of the United Kingdom and to ease us and fuse us into an all Ireland, and every step of the way requires dilution of our Britishness.

Culture is Sinn Féin's new theatre of war.

Mr Speaker: Order. As the Member will know, I give Members quite a bit of latitude in the House. However, once again, I ask him and the entire House to recognise the motion that is before us this morning. I ask the Member to speak to the motion as far as possible.

Mr Allister: I understand, Mr Speaker. I also understand, as I am sure that you do, that the debate is important not only inside the House but outside it. Frustrations and anxieties that are boiling over on our streets need to be addressed and spoken to in the House. I am mindful of the direction, but I am also mindful of that. In that context, there are some points that I think one needs to make.

I said that culture is Sinn Féin's new theatre of war. Although some people in the republican movement are resting the Armalite, they have moved seamlessly to take up the weapons of cultural warfare. Hence, parades and flags must go. Those who orchestrated and justified terror must rule over us. Perpetrators of terror must be equated with victims. We must have play parks named after their evil heroes. Sinn Féin Ministers must be allowed to discriminate in appointments with impunity. The unionist community is expected to sit back and consent benignly to the trampling underfoot of its culture and identity by forces that are insatiable and still live by the mantra of "Brits out". That is what the taking-down of the flag crystallises in its own particular way.

I want to address directly those loyalists outside the House who have fallen into the trap of spoiling legitimate protest by attendant violence. I understand completely the sentiment that I hear being expressed that, when they look at the Stormont structures, people conclude that violence pays. However, I say to them that their cause — the cause of the British flag — is far more noble and honourable than that, unlike the cause of rebellion that brought terrorism to our streets. Do not sully that cause by treading the violent path for which republicans set the way. The violence of recent days has only added to the glee of those who removed the flag. I say to young men that if they cannot go to a protest without a stone in their pocket, they should stay at home. If they have any pride in their flag, they do not need to cover their face. They should be proud to be seen to support the flag.

Let me make it very clear: I abhor and condemn all the violence of the hangers-on and the threats, arson and intimidation. There is no justification for any of it, and it should stop. It should never have started.

The House has a responsibility. It glibly talks about shared space but gives no thought to those to whom it gives no space and who see their cultural space being relentlessly suppressed.

I hear people talk about an attack on democracy, but look at the perversion of democracy that is practised here. Think of the two fundamental cornerstones of democracy; the right to change your Government; and the right to have an opposition. We continue to fail to address those issues by clinging to the absurdity and anti-democratic structure of mandatory coalition. Do not be surprised if there is a growing disconnect with those who are being denied those basic tenets of democracy. There is no point in lecturing people about not voting and then constructing a system that denies them the right to vote a party out of Government and the right to even have an opposition. Those issues need to be addressed.

It is not just the people looking for trouble on our streets who need to pull back but those who, day and daily, sustain the very structures —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Allister: — that deny the opportunity of real democracy in action. Stormont needs to tackle the beam in its own eye.

Mr Agnew: First, I would like to put on record the Green Party's condemnation of the violence that has occurred over the past week. In particular, the Green Party would like to stand in solidarity with any political representative who had their home or office attacked or who had threats

made against them. We would also like to condemn the violence against the PSNI, which has sought only to protect our democracy.

It is always important that we as political representatives are mindful of the language we use in political debate, recognising that our words can have an impact throughout our society. However, on Wednesday evening, when I got the word that the home of Councillors Michael and Christine Bower and their young daughter was attacked, I became acutely aware of the vulnerability of my family. For the first time in my political career, I felt that I had to watch what I said for fear that my family could face a similar attack. For some in the House, I know that that has been a reality of their political career over the past number of decades. However, when I entered politics, I hoped and believed that Northern Ireland politics had moved on, and I see these attacks as a major step backwards. Attacks and threats against any elected representative are unacceptable and undermine our democracy.

The issue of identity has been at the heart of Northern Ireland politics. We have rightly sought to move away from identity as a source of division to a position where we have mutual respect. Diversity can and should be celebrated, not feared. Speaking personally, there are many aspects to my identity. In Northern Ireland, I have the right to dual nationality, so I can be, and am, both British and Irish. However, I am like many people who probably feel more comfortable with the term "Northern Irish", but I am also European. I am a father, a son, a brother, and an uncle. I am also a vegetarian. So, there are many things that make up who I am and my identity.

I am proud of who I am, and that includes the part of me that is proud to be British. I am proud of the National Health Service, which is free at the point of use. I am proud of our welfare state, which ensures that we all have a safety net should we find ourselves unemployed, as so many have during this economic downturn. I am proud of our democracy and the freedom of speech that underpins it. I am proud of the freedom of the press to hold us, as elected representatives, to account. Whether the Union flag flies at City Hall, Stormont or anywhere else for that matter, I will be no less British, no less Irish and no less European. Indeed, I will be no less than what I am today.

The real attack on my identity has been the attacks by those who undermine that freedom of speech by making me fear that what I say could result in attack on my family.

11.15 am

The attacks on the social welfare system and the institution of the NHS by politicians at Westminster and in the Assembly have led me to take to the streets —

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, there is no doubt about it; the Member has gone totally off the motion. I am trying to be sympathetic to Members in slightly widening the debate, but I ask the Member to come back, as far as possible, to the motion.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Speaker for his guidance, and I will try to do that.

I have taken to the streets and protested with trade unions and other workers who have sought to defend the institutions that they see as integral to their identity and well-being. However, we did so peacefully, and I call

on anyone who wishes to protest any decision of our democracy to do so peacefully. We must be mindful that riots tend not to happen when we have high employment, high educational achievement and financial security. So, whether it has been the riots in London or the riots in Belfast, we must remember as politicians that addressing those issues is our core duty.

If we are to show leadership in the Assembly, those are the issues that we should be tackling. You cannot eat a flag, a flag will not heat your home and a flag cannot give you self-esteem. If we are to improve the lives of those in Protestant, unionist and loyalist estates, such as Ballybeen, where I grew up, we need to get back to addressing those important issues of economic, social and environmental importance.

Within the Green Party there are members who consider themselves British, members who consider themselves Irish and members who consider themselves Northern Irish. Indeed, we have members from England, Scotland, Holland and Germany, and others from across the world. That diversity does not divide our party and should not divide our society.

Mr McNarry: I am with the peaceful and silent protesters sickened by the irresponsible removal of the Union flag from Belfast City Hall. To those who turned their protest into wanton violence, I say to them categorically, "You are wrong. Despite your best efforts, the moral high ground remains with those participating in lawful, peaceful protest." Scenes of uncontrollable anger brought disgrace and turned legitimate revulsion into unacceptable mob violence, doing no service whatsoever to the British culture that unionists under pressure strive to maintain and uphold in this part of the United Kingdom.

Among the many e-mails I received, one began, "I am a loyalist, a Protestant, an Orangeman, and a unionist", and went on to challenge my credentials on the flags issue. I replied, "I am a loyalist, a Protestant, an Orangeman and a unionist", and asserted my credentials. The point being that the e-mailer returned with an acceptable apology, going on to explain his deeply felt hurt and anger at believing that the erosion of his Britishness was visible to him in seeing the removal of the Union flag.

As I and thousands of others do, he feels betrayed and helpless that what happened in Belfast is irreversible. Well, we shall see. However, what happened will leave a deep and lasting scar. The wound is open and festering within the political landscape and, as a consequence, the Alliance Party will pay dearly at the ballot box. That said, I say to the joint proposers of the motion that UKIP will vote for it. It encapsulates our condemnation of violence. The rest of it comprises what any right-thinking person would endorse. Unfortunately, despite its length, the motion falls short of expressing the full rigour of unionist anger aimed at those who combined to take down the Union flag. What is wrong with the motion —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: — is the glaring omission of condemnation —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr McNarry: — and the pillorying of the joint action of Irish republicans.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist.

Mr McNarry: In case the Member did not hear that, let me repeat it: what is wrong with the motion is the glaring omission of condemnation and the pillorying of the joint action of Irish republicans and nationalists in cahoots with Alliance. Sinn Féin is the self-proclaimed proponent of a sham reconciliation policy. I accept its duplicity. As for the SDLP, I can do no other but accept its pomposity. However, the Alliance Party, with its bombast, as so-called middle-of-the-road neutrals, I do not accept your excuses offered today for the travesty that you have — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McNarry: — promoted.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. I have allowed the Member quite a bit of latitude to set the scene. I ask the Member to please get back to the motion that is before the House. The Member will know that I allowed him some latitude in setting the scene and coming back to the motion.

Mr McNarry: Mr Speaker, let me be clear: before I was interrupted, I was moving on to the point that I think that everybody would like to hear.

Let me be clear that attacking homes, making threats and vandalising offices is not acceptable. No one in this place is applauding such vile, nasty, cowardly acts, but the motion refers to the flags issue; it is in there. No one should attempt to treat thousands of unionists as fools or divert attention away from any part they played in what was and is a grubby deal that was premeditated and focused and deliberately designed to apply total disrespect to those who give allegiance to the flying of the Union flag.

Undoubtedly, this issue will bring home repercussions, affecting future relationships in this place. That is regrettable, because my sense is that the atmosphere here had improved. The attitude to our collective duties was developing; people were being caring and professional. Even in the Committees, Members who previously could not look at each other, never mind talk to each other, were engaging in shared concerns. Sometimes, a mild banter developed in the Committees. These issues impact on our constituents; they are the issues of jobs, investments and spending, and they must remain uppermost in our minds in the House. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr McNarry: Now, however, we are plunged into crisis management, all because, in Belfast City Hall, the anti-British mask slipped off, the pretence was exposed and a reality check pushed the clock backwards. It is a serious setback for us. Much has been made of the decision taken in that place. If decisions taken elsewhere are deemed democratically binding, the same rules should apply to decisions taken in this place. I hope that decisions will be taken in this place that give confidence to the unionist people here in Northern Ireland.

Innocents suffered last week, as they always do. None more so than the business community. Staff and customers were caught up. I am sure that the House will join together in a sincere expression of regret over what transpired last week and the damage done.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr McNarry: I am sure that we can conclude the debate by offering our best wishes that the tills that are ringing are ringing in a good Christmas for all.

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): When the deputy First Minister and I tabled the motion, we confined it to language that was structured to gain a united response. It was very clearly worded to ensure that we did not have, at this moment, a debate on the flags issue, but that debate will have to come. It will have to come as a democratic, legitimate debate on the issue, and I believe that that will start tomorrow in the Assembly Commission. I say to the Member who has just resumed his seat that I share the frustration and anger of many people about the removal of the flag, but that frustration and anger should not flow out into violence; it must be channelled into democratic processes. We regard it as essential that, on this day, considering the backcloth against which we are speaking, the Assembly speaks with one voice.

Politics is not about agreeing on everything, but it is about resolving our differences through exclusively peaceful and democratic means. Although we may disagree on many political issues, we must not disagree on the right of people to express their own views in a democratic manner. The United States Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said on Friday:

"There will always be disagreements in democratic society but violence is never an acceptable response."

Politics is about the power of persuasion. People are entitled to make their views known. Indeed, doing so is an integral part of the democratic process itself. Democracy is not conducted in secret. People are entitled to have opinions and to express them. I will defend their right to influence decisions and their right to peacefully protest if they do not agree with those decisions. The right to protest is as fundamental to the democratic process as the right to vote. But let us be clear: there is no right to attack police officers or council staff. There is no right to destroy property. There is no right to threaten or to intimidate. There is no right to endanger life, harm, injure or kill. There is no right to attack elected representatives because you do not agree with their views.

I know what it is like to get a knock on the door and to be told by the police that someone is trying to kill me. I have received that visit not once but many times, and many people in the House will have received the same kind of visit. Having received that kind of visit, I know, perhaps more than many, the impact that it has on a family and personal life. Those of us who have been through the fire know, more than any, what it is like, and, without vagueness, equivocation or reserve, we stand side by side with those who are under threat today.

Mr Dickson: Will the First Minister give way?

Mr P Robinson: I think that it is inappropriate to do so, Mr Speaker —

Some Members: Why?

Mr P Robinson: I think the whole tenor of this debate —

Mr A Maginness: This man has suffered.

Mr P Robinson: Well, I have to say that, having suffered, I recognise and have already indicated my disapproval

and condemnation of all of those who have attacked or threatened — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Robinson: — or threatened. It is essential that that is recognised, whether it be members of the Alliance Party or my colleague Sammy Brush, who, once again, has been attacked in his home.

Mrs Foster: Yes, do you remember Sammy Brush? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mrs Foster: What about him? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: Raymond McCreesh park.

Mr Speaker: Order.

A Member: Hypocrites.

Mrs Foster: Hypocrites.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Poots: The whole damn lot of you.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr P Robinson: I include in that, Mr Speaker, the Alliance members who have been singled out for threat or attack and my party colleague and all others in the House and elsewhere who have been subjected to attack in their home or office.

Mr Lyttle: Will the First Minister give way?

Mr P Robinson: I also include the PSNI officers who are on the front line and those others who have been injured — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Lyttle: Will the First Minister give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not persist in expecting interventions. It is up to the Member who has the Floor to decide whether to take an intervention. We really should move on, and Members should not persist. First Minister — *[Interruption.]* Order.

11.30 am

Mr P Robinson: Attacks on property or the intimidation of elected representatives may not be new, but they must be condemned each and every time they occur. In defending democratically elected politicians, we defend democracy itself. Let us be clear: those who threaten politicians or attack their homes have crossed the line from protest into terrorism. There are some who think that, to stop those who violently disagree with democratic decisions, those who politically disagree with the decisions should not express their opposition. There are even those who claim that anyone who holds and democratically expresses such views is heightening tension or, worse still, they are accused of inciting those who act outside the law.

Let us be sure that, in defending democracy, we do not shut down the means for those who are opposed to democratically taken decisions to express disapproval and seek change peacefully, legitimately and democratically. At the same time, it places a heavy burden on all who wish to protest to ensure that their protests are entirely peaceful.

I hope that all in the Assembly will be able to unite to condemn the threats and violence against elected representatives, the police and others, and the wanton destruction of property. I hope that they will be able to unite to express sympathy to all those who have been targeted. I hope that they will be able to unite to confirm our absolute commitment to the rule of law and to moving forward by exclusively peaceful and democratic means. I hope that they will be able to unite to renew our adherence to having a free and open democracy in which everyone can peacefully and legitimately express their views for or against any issue, even if others do not share that view.

I am happy to give way to the Member who has been impacted by the recent attack on his office, but let us ensure that this does not end up being a controversial debate. It needs to be a debate in which a clear condemnation of violence is expressed by elected representatives, and the Assembly should unite on that.

Mr Dickson: I much appreciate that. My intervention is a simple question to the First Minister: was calling for a suspension rather than a cessation of the protests and violence a wise or unwise call?

Mr P Robinson: I think that it is very wise. Nobody but a tyrant would suggest that there should be an end to peaceful protest in public. Who on earth would suggest that it is appropriate that people cannot peacefully and publicly protest about decisions that they do not agree with? However, I have said and confirm again today that, in the present atmosphere in which people are trying to use peaceful protest to cause violence, it would be appropriate for the organisers to suspend the protests. However, that should never take away from the right of people to have peaceful, democratic protest. The Member for North Down mentioned his participation in peaceful public protest. Would anybody suggest that he should be denied the right to make such a protest? Of course he should not. That is why I said that the protest should be suspended in light of the violence that is taking place and to make sure that the protests are not used by those who have an ulterior motive. I hope that the Member understands my position on that.

Again, let the Assembly speak as one on those fundamentals to ensure that the wider public debate is conducted in a proper, lawful and peaceful manner and that there is recognition among all in our community that it is completely legitimate for people to oppose the decision of Belfast City Council, providing that they do so in a peaceful and democratic manner.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly unequivocally condemns the rioting and the campaign of intimidation, harassment and violent attacks on elected representatives following the decision of Belfast City Council in relation to the flying of the Union flag; expresses its sympathy to all those who have been attacked, injured or threatened with attack in recent days, including police officers, elected representatives and their staff; reaffirms the absolute and unconditional commitment of all its Members to respecting and upholding the rule of law and the pursuit of their political objectives by purely legal and political means; and insists that any further protests be peaceful, orderly and organised in accordance with the law.

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Health and Food Safety

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make the following statement on the fifteenth North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meeting held in health and food safety sectoral format, which was held in the NSMC joint secretariat offices in Armagh on Wednesday 21 November 2012. Minister Michelle O'Neill MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive at the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Dr James Reilly TD, Minister for Health, and Frances Fitzgerald TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. I chaired the meeting. The statement has been agreed with Minister O'Neill, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

Ministers noted that an initial scoping meeting for the North/South alcohol forum took place in October. Key players in alcohol policy from both jurisdictions met to share information and practice in dealing with alcohol misuse. The continuing development of strategies in both jurisdictions on alcohol misuse and collaboration on minimum unit pricing for alcohol was also noted.

We received an update on Northern Ireland's 10-year tobacco control strategy, including the establishment of a multiagency group to take it forward. Minister Reilly and I support the publishing of the legislative proposal for the tobacco directive by the European Commission at the earliest opportunity.

Ministers noted the findings from the public consultation process in Ireland on calorie posting in restaurants, which indicate a high level of support among the general public and in the food industry for calorie-menu labelling. The progress in Northern Ireland of Caloriewise and the front-of-pack consultation, which will empower consumers to make healthier food choices, was also noted.

We noted and welcomed the ongoing co-operation and progress on the range of actions in the all-Ireland action plan on suicide prevention, in particular the sharing of education and training programmes and the publication of the WorkOut online application, which is designed to improve the mental fitness of young men.

Ministers noted that the establishment of a radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital is further progressing and that officials are working together to ensure the effective delivery of the project.

We welcomed the rapid progression by the All Ireland Institute of Hospice and Palliative Care in its work on education, research and the provision of care. We also welcomed the continuing success in multinational research through the US-Ireland R&D Partnership, including the development of common documentation and working procedures to deal with funding proposals involving health researchers from both jurisdictions and the US, which were implemented and launched in August 2012, and the publication of major findings, which attracted significant international interest, on the identification of the genes that may cause some patients with diabetes to develop serious kidney disease.

Ministers noted that the child protection work programme that had been agreed at the NSMC health and food safety meeting in July 2012 is being taken forward, and we welcomed news that an all-island child protection conference will be held in the first half of 2013. Conference delegates will share practice knowledge, research and learning among policymakers, practitioners and managers on safeguarding and child protection practices.

Ministers noted the health presidency programme to be progressed during Ireland's presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Officials from the Irish Department of Health are exploring areas of common interest with officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in advance of the eHealth high-level conference, which Ireland will host in May 2013. The Minister for Health indicated that he wishes to ensure continued North/South engagement during the presidency, and it is hoped that, where appropriate, I and my officials will attend key events.

Ministers received a presentation on the work of Safefood from its CEO, Martin Higgins. The report highlighted the range of consumer and scientific activities undertaken by the body and its work on developing an indicator for measuring food poverty. The report covered Safefood's involvement with the Department of the Environment and the Environmental Protection Agency in a joint campaign focusing on improving customers' understanding of "best before" and "use by" dates.

We approved the appointment of five new members to Safefood's scientific advisory committee, as well as the appointments of Dr Mary Upton and Mr Robert Huey as chair and vice-chair respectively. We also welcomed a report by the scientific advisory committee on emerging food safety issues and noted the proposal in the report of a new model of addressing emerging issues on an all-island basis.

Finally, the reappointment of Martin Higgins as Safefood's CEO until May 2015 was approved by Ministers.

Ms S Ramsey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome the Minister's statement and genuinely welcome the fact that an all-island child protection conference will take place in the early part of next year. That issue has been raised in the House on a number of occasions, and I am keen to get more detail about that closer to the time from the Minister.

The Minister mentioned Safefood in his statement. Has its business plan for 2012-13 been signed off yet and is Safefood's remit now complete? In parallel to what is in the statement, did you have the opportunity during or after the meeting to have any discussion with Minister Reilly on the future of children's paediatric cardiac services? If you did, it is important that you give us an update on that.

Mr Poots: I have approved the 2012 business plan, but I understand that we still await clearance from Minister Reilly before it can be submitted for clearance by the Finance Minister here in Northern Ireland. Once the Ministers have approved the plan, it will be formally approved at the next available NSMC meeting.

As regards meetings on the sideline, we had a very useful meeting with Dr Reilly relating to paediatric care. We are very much focused on trying to find a network solution

between our service and the service available in Dublin. We are very keen to ensure that some level of service is retained in Northern Ireland. All of this will rely on the medical people giving us very clear advice that this is the safest way possible to ensure that we can provide that care. We will take advice from the clinicians on the issue.

Mr Wells: Will the Minister indicate whether there was any discussion on the importing of illegal cigarettes and tobacco products and whether anything can be done on a joint basis to ensure that that is stopped or at least curtailed?

Mr Poots: Illegal tobacco products are of significant concern to us. We are looking at how we can make a difference on the issue. We have the 10-year tobacco strategy for Northern Ireland, which we launched in February 2012. We are also looking at banning smoking in cars.

We have the Tobacco Retailer Sanctions Bill. We have introduced tobacco controls in respect of the numbers of outlets that are able to sell tobacco, including vending machines. The issue of illicit tobacco is primarily a matter for HMRC. It is a concern for my Department that the availability of contraband tobacco provides an accessible source of tobacco for young people. The proposed Bill requires that all retailers of tobacco products are registered. A fine can be applied for failing to register. It is unlikely that those selling illegal tobacco products will choose to register with their local district council. Therefore, a by-product of the new legislation may be that it will lead to an increase in the number of illicit tobacco retailers receiving fines and/or its acting as a deterrent to illegal trading.

We should recognise that this is a highly prevalent activity in our community. It is an area in which paramilitary organisations very often benefit as regards profiteering. The tobacco sold is also of a lower standard. So, although there are no good cigarettes, illicit cigarettes are potentially even more dangerous than the ones that are sold in shops.

Mr Gardiner: I thank the Minister for his statement. Following last week's ban on irresponsible drinks promotions, can the Minister detail what measure he expects to be brought forward to reduce the availability of cheap alcohol, therefore addressing the major health demands on both sides of the border?

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the question. That debate has now moved across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, which is to be welcomed. For some time, the Westminster Government resisted the calls for minimum pricing of alcohol. I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has indicated on a number of occasions that this is something that they are now looking at proactively.

A minimum price for alcohol across the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, throughout the British Isles, would make a significant difference to the availability of drink to younger people. It would make a significant difference to the abuse of alcohol that takes place. It will make a very marginal difference to people who take a drink regularly but who drink in moderation. It will have little impact on them.

Those arguments all need to be put out there into the public domain so that people can fully understand them.

However, this would greatly assist us in our battle for better public health and, indeed, in our battle for a better society.

11.45 am

Mr McDevitt: Can I join the Minister in welcoming the news that the all-island child protection conference will be held in the first half of next year? In the light of the progress that we have made locally with the establishment of the institutional abuse inquiry, does the Minister agree that it is now time to start a conversation through the North/South Ministerial Council on how we might co-ordinate an all-island approach to the investigation of allegations of past clerical abuse?

Mr Poots: I have absolutely no problem dealing with the Republic of Ireland on what is in the best interests of both communities; I am not really interested in developing the political side of it at all.

Where the potential for dealing with abuse is concerned, we must maximise the opportunities to ensure our children's safety in the first instance. If we have information that will assist the Republic of Ireland or if the Republic of Ireland has information that will assist our authorities in bringing people to justice for their abuse, it is incumbent on us to share it. My officials and ROI officials held a meeting on a series of workstreams related to child protection. I am certainly happy to look at this, particularly when we see the crisis that has arisen in the BBC and the crisis that arose previously in the Catholic Church. There are many other organisations and groups where this type of activity took place. So, whilst there has been a big focus on quite large organisations where things should have been done better, let us be honest with ourselves and with everybody else and say that child abuse did not stop there. There is a lot more out there for us to detect, and it is important that we do that. It is also important that our social workers are equipped and have the support to ensure that child abuse is much more difficult for people to get away with now than was the case in the past. It is one of the most reprehensible acts that anyone can become involved in, so, if we can do more to bring people to justice for it, I will be a willing participant in that.

Mr McCarthy: I very much welcome the Minister's statement this morning. Food poverty was raised at the meeting. Like the rest of us, the Minister will be aware of the huge food wastage throughout the island and, indeed, the islands. Has there been any talk or initiative or strategy in the North/South Ministerial Council about tackling that enormous waste? It could contribute to overcoming food poverty.

Mr Poots: I am sure that the Member is aware of a series of organisations that ensure that food that is coming close to its sell-by date is used and used well, as opposed to being destroyed. A lot of our large supermarkets participate in that, along with others in the retail sector. So, those food centres do a good job in getting low-cost or no-cost food out to people who need it. I know that, even in my constituency, many people are considerably more vulnerable now than they were previously. Many people hang about supermarkets waiting for an item to come on at the lowest possible cost that they can afford. Many people are in a very difficult position in that respect. We also want to educate people better about use-by and sell-by dates so that families can be encouraged to make good use of the food that they have.

Ms P Bradley: I thank the Minister for his statement. What scope is there to realise further efficiency savings from bodies such as Safefood?

Mr Poots: In 2012, James Reilly and I asked officials to review the range of work of Safefood and the other organisations that deal with food safety, diet and nutrition to avoid possible duplication and to see whether there was potential for savings to be made or scope for improved value for money. The DHSSPS has completed that, and I have accepted the recommendations. My Department has started to arrange the implementation of the recommendations. In the South, the Department of Health review is ongoing, but that work is expected to be completed shortly. The joint sponsor Departments will then work together to consider the recommendations that impact on Safefood. This has resulted in the original budget for 2012 decreasing from some €8.5 million to €7.5 million. My Department funds 30% of the Safefood budget, so that will deliver us a saving of some £260,000.

It should also be noted that, working from a 2010 baseline, the Food Safety Promotion Board was required to deliver cumulative efficiencies of 6% in 2012, which is €571,000. However, as the original draft budget for 2012 was €8.5 million, a reduction of €1 million was made from the 2010 baseline. That arose as a cash-releasing efficiency saving, identified over three years. We accelerated that into 2011 and sustained it into 2012.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for his statement, and I specifically welcome the progress on the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin, where work is due to commence next year. That is very positive. Is it intended that the all-island action plan on suicide prevention will review current service provision, with increased targeting of resources to areas of most need in specific constituencies?

Mr Poots: A series of things are being done to improve mental health and, as a consequence, reduce suicide. For example, there is the 'WorkOut' website, which is aimed at young men and has been designed so that they can access it in their own time and engage with it on their own terms. It allows users to undertake and track a series of activities that provide an indication of their mental wellness. We also have the report of the Young Men and Suicide Project in Northern Ireland, which makes an important contribution to tackling suicide among young males. The report recommends the development of suicide prevention programmes and a future direction for suicide prevention policy.

We are also addressing cyberbullying. The UK Council for Child Internet Safety is to address problems of online bullying and promote safer internet use. The council has developed programmes to increase parental awareness of how to stay safe online and to improve the resources available to schools to teach children about safe internet use, as well as to build their resilience to potentially inappropriate content that they may encounter online. We are represented on that council. Work is also being done to counter websites that glamorise and encourage suicide. I know that William McCrea has been working very hard on that over at Westminster. We also have a suicide surveillance system, which was developed for the early notification of suspected deaths by suicide. Quite a lot of other work is being done, but time constrains me.

Ms Brown: I also welcome the Minister's statement. What potential is there for Northern Ireland to benefit from eHealth Week?

Mr Poots: The eHealth Week provides us with significant opportunities because, throughout the European Union, Northern Ireland is ahead of the curve on a range of these issues. That is why we have applied for reference region status in Europe, which is being made available to five or six regions or countries. The eHealth Week allows us to demonstrate activities where we do things that others are considering. I have had the opportunity to visit Fold Housing Association headquarters, from where we conduct telemonitoring. There are nurses there who check the vital signs of individuals every day. They talk to people regularly, and, as a consequence, many more people stay out of hospital. So, a considerable amount of work is being done on e-health. A memorandum of understanding has been established with the Department of Enterprise to drive the issue forward. An ecosystem has been established between the universities, the business sector and the health sector. That course of work will pay future dividends and allow us to sustain good healthcare against difficult budgets.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement, which mentions that:

"Officials from the Department of Health are exploring areas of common interest with officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in advance of the e-health high-level conference ... in May 2013."

Was there any discussion on Transforming Your Care, particularly on cross-border co-operation, with the use of hospitals such as Daisy Hill?

Mr Poots: Those discussions did not take place at the North/South meeting, but we discussed it in the meeting with Minister Reilly. The Republic of Ireland is particularly interested in the availability of a 24-hour cath lab in Altnagelvin Area Hospital, not only for Donegal but for the western counties. There is also the issue of an air ambulance and whether that can be facilitated on a North/South basis to provide value for money that we cannot currently demonstrate for such a service in Northern Ireland alone. Those conversations are continuing on how best we can provide those services.

Mr Byrne: Like other Members, I welcome the Minister's statement. I welcome the clarification about Safefood's current existence and immediate future. Will the Minister consider raising the issue of tackling obesity, particularly in primary and secondary schools? It is a growing problem, and Safefood may be a vehicle that could be used to deal with it.

Mr Poots: A number of vehicles could be used. To be perfectly honest, the Public Health Agency is the lead body on obesity, and that should remain the case. My key focus for investment will be on the Public Health Agency because it does work on alcohol, smoking, encouraging people to be more active and, indeed, on obesity. Considerable work remains to be done. Safefood did some work, for example, on the nutritional value of Chinese takeaway food, which is very popular. Members may be interested to know, in their own interests, that one portion of prawn crackers — just over 600 calories — contains

about one quarter of an individual's daily calorie needs. People need to be aware of what they eat and the amounts that they eat. If you continue to take in considerably more calories than your metabolic system needs in conjunction with your activity, you will become obese and consequently have a greater likelihood of worse health. People need to address those issues, and we will ensure, through the Public Health Agency in the first instance, that they are well informed.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will the Minister update us on progress on plain packaging for cigarettes?

Mr Poots: That debate is taking place across the UK. We need a good discussion on the issue. In supermarkets, cigarettes have been removed from their former glamorous stands and are now kept behind screens so that people cannot see the packaging, and that will be the case in local shops. We need a debate, and I have not concluded where exactly I stand on the issue. I have some concerns that plain packaging may provide greater opportunities for those who deal in contraband cigarettes. It is a difficult conundrum. I know that they practise this in other places, and we need to take our references from countries such as Canada and Australia, which have made considerably greater progress than we have. I understand that Australia is going down that route, so we will see whether that makes an impact on its figures. Let us watch just how things are done in other places and learn from best practice.

12.00 noon

Mr Allister: When the Minister reported on the previous sectoral meeting, it emerged that the budget and business plan for the Food Safety Promotion Board for 2012 had not even been approved. Now that we are almost at the end of 2012, will he update us on that? On the previous occasion, the Minister said that he was very concerned to stamp out duplication in the provision, and one can well understand that, considering that this particular North/South body, which employs no-one from Northern Ireland, has had the benefit of over £20 million from the Northern Ireland block grant since its inception. Can he bring us any comfort that the financial laxity that has afflicted this North/South body is being reigned in?

Mr Poots: I would have hoped that that had been dealt with in previous answers and that the Member might have had something a little more original. Nonetheless, I will answer it again for his benefit, in case he did not pick up what was said previously. Yes, it has been approved by me and is awaiting approval by Dr Reilly. It will then be forwarded to our Finance Ministers. Yes, we have instituted savings, and I indicated that, in Northern Ireland, that would be a saving of some £260,000 in this financial year. I assume that the Member would welcome that.

Salmon Conservation

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): A Cheann Comhairle, Mr Speaker, it is with regret that I am unable to make the statement today. I apologise to you, to the Chair of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure, members of that Committee and Members of the Assembly. The statement was not with Members in a timely fashion to give them an opportunity to read it thoroughly and, therefore, ask informed questions. I profusely apologise again. I have no understanding of what happened, but I want to make it clear that no one from my Department will treat anyone in the House or on any Committee with any disrespect or contempt. All I can do is apologise profusely. It is totally unacceptable. I will ensure that the statement is forwarded to all Members, and I will make my officials available to the CAL Committee again on Thursday. My apologies again.

Mr Speaker: Order. I appreciate the Minister apologising to the House for the statement not being here.

Mr McGimpsey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I am not taking any points of order on the issue. The Minister has come to the House, and she has apologised, which was the right thing to do. Let us move on to the next business.

Executive Committee Business

Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Speaker: The next items are motions to approve statutory rules that deal with matters related to occupational and personal pension schemes. There will be a separate debate on each of the statutory rules. However, the Minister and Members will be allowed some latitude to address the broad policy and issues that are common to both sets of regulations during the first debate. I hope that the House will find that helpful. For the avoidance of doubt, the third motion is about a separate issue, and we will debate it when we come to it.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The regulations, together with the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012, which we will consider shortly, amend the principal automatic enrolment regulations, which set out the arrangements for automatic enrolment to give effect to changes made by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012.

As I have said before to the House, I am very conscious that, when dealing with pensions, it is easy to get lost in the maze of technical provisions and pensions jargon. However, the rules that we are considering today are complex and highly technical. Although I will try to keep my comments at a fairly high level, some jargon is unfortunately inevitable. I will do my best to keep it to a minimum.

The Pensions (No. 2) Act (Northern Ireland) 2008, as amended by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012, introduced a duty on employers to enrol eligible workers in a qualifying workplace pension and to make minimum contributions into it. Under the legislation, employers are able to choose the qualifying workplace pension scheme they adopt to discharge that duty. A qualifying scheme is a scheme that meets specific criteria; for example, an occupational pension scheme, including the national employment savings trust (NEST), which operates UK-wide, or a workplace personal pension scheme.

Members may recall that, during our debates on the 2012 Act, I highlighted the delicate balancing act between, on the one hand, safeguarding scheme members' rights and, on the other hand, seeking to minimise the burdens on employers, particularly in these challenging economic times. With that in mind, it is important that we do what we can to ensure that employers who already provide their workers with a good pension scheme will be able to meet their duties under automatic enrolment without the need for costly changes to pension schemes and payroll systems. Employers with existing schemes may certify that their schemes are qualifying schemes, if they meet certain criteria. The intention is that, by applying a simple test, employers will be able to check whether their existing scheme is good enough. The regulations set

out the detailed rules for certification, with appropriate safeguards for individual members, and include further qualifying conditions for certain average salary schemes. For example, the regulations set out who may issue a certificate, the form that the certificate must take, when it must be renewed and the requirements that the scheme must meet before a certificate can be used.

The regulations make technical provision largely flowing from the Assembly's agreement to changes made by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. As the Minister said, these rules can be complex. The Committee had the opportunity to have these complex rules explained by officials. As the Minister said, it is about striking a balance between the rights of employee and employer and ensuring that the scheme benefits both. Certainly, that was explained in considerable detail to the Committee. The Committee had no particular issues, having had the scheme explained. That is all I have to say on the statutory rule.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased that the Social Development Committee has supported the regulations, and I thank the Deputy Chair and the Committee for the positive way in which they have dealt with them.

Automatic enrolment is the biggest change to pension provision in the United Kingdom for many years. I think that we all agree it is right that we do whatever we can to ensure that automatic enrolment delivers a good income in retirement, whilst minimising administrative burdens on employers, particularly in these challenging economic times. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):
I beg to move

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The regulations further amend the principal automatic enrolment regulations, which set out the arrangements for automatic enrolment, to ensure that the regulations give effect to the original policy intention. The principal regulations exclude certain schemes providing average salary benefits from being qualifying schemes for automatic enrolment, unless they meet minimum revaluation requirements. Revaluation can be achieved by the scheme either providing for guaranteed revaluation or providing for funded revaluation. However, a scheme that had a mix of guaranteed revaluation below the minimum rate and a discretionary power to revalue at a higher rate, technically, would not meet the minimum revaluation requirements. Similarly, a new average salary scheme that revalues in line with the retail price index would technically not qualify. That had the effect of excluding otherwise high-quality schemes on a technicality.

To restore the policy intention, the regulations, first, allow average salary schemes that provide for discretionary increases or a mix of guaranteed and discretionary increases to qualify, provided that the revaluation is funded for and included in the statement of funding principles on the basis that revaluation is at or above the minimum rate. Secondly, they allow any average salary scheme that revalues in line with the retail price index to qualify, not just those with members on 1 July 2012. That fits with the original policy intention of allowing schemes flexibility on how they provide for revaluation while protecting members' benefits, and it ensures that high-quality schemes can be qualifying schemes for automatic enrolment.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Again, the Minister has talked about the policy intention of the regulations. That and the complexities of the regulations were explained to the Committee. Again, the Committee had no difficulties in agreeing with both the policy intention and the regulations.

Mr McCausland: Again, I am pleased that the Social Development Committee has endorsed and supported the regulations. I thank the deputy Chair and the Committee for the positive way in which they have dealt with them. The regulations form the final piece of the framework for automatic enrolment. I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Pension Protection Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):
I beg to move

That the Pension Protection Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The regulations amend several sets of regulations relating to the operation of the pension protection fund as a consequence of changes made by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012. They reflect the experience gained from operating the fund since April 2005 and aim to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. Members may find it helpful if I provide some background to the provisions.

The pension protection fund, which operates across the United Kingdom, was set up in 2005 to protect members of eligible pension schemes. The fund does that by making compensation payments to members of eligible pension schemes where the sponsoring employer has become insolvent and there are insufficient assets for the scheme to cover the pension liabilities. The pension protection fund is financed through the residual assets of pension schemes transferring into the pension protection fund, investment returns and annual levies made up of a pension protection levy and an administration levy charged to all qualifying and defined benefit occupational pension schemes.

Schemes that may be eligible to enter the pension protection fund must undergo regular valuations of their assets and liabilities to determine their level of funding. The information from the evaluation is indicative of the likelihood of a scheme making a claim on the pension protection fund and is used as part of the calculation of how much annual pension protection levy a scheme must pay. In the event that the scheme's sponsoring employer becomes insolvent, the scheme will enter an assessment period for entry to the pension protection fund.

As part of the process, the board of the pension protection fund is required to obtain a fresh valuation, undertaken by an actuary, of the scheme's assets and liabilities at the time of insolvency.

12.15 pm

The regulations provide for the board of the pension protection fund to determine the funding position of an eligible pension scheme without the need to obtain a fresh actuarial valuation and to obtain its own valuation of the assets and protected liabilities of the scheme where it has been demonstrated that it is not possible to obtain a protected benefits quotation. A protected benefits quotation is a quotation from an insurance provider of the cost of purchasing annuities, providing each scheme member with benefits equivalent to the compensation that they would receive if their scheme transferred to the pension protection fund or their scheme benefits, whichever is lower. That means that, if a scheme can demonstrate that it has taken reasonable steps to obtain a protected benefits quotation from an annuity provider, it can apply to the pension protection fund to assume responsibility for the scheme.

The regulations also enable the pension protection fund to assess for entry a scheme that has been running as a closed scheme without being required to obtain an actuarial valuation. A closed scheme is one for which there has been an employer insolvency but where it did not transfer to the fund because scheme assets exceeded the assessed value of the fund compensation at that time.

In summary, the regulations permit the board of the pension protection fund to make a funding determination without requiring a new actuarial valuation; require an application that does not include a protected benefits quotation to provide evidence that all reasonable steps have been taken to try to obtain one; require the board to provide a summary of a funding determination made containing the same information that the members and beneficiaries would have received had a fresh valuation been obtained from an actuary; set out how funding determinations are to be carried out; specify the time limits for an application for review or reconsideration of a decision by the board not to obtain a valuation and the issue of a funding determination; specify the interested persons who may apply for such a review; set the time limits for an applicant to refer the issue with one of the new reviewable matters to the pension protection fund ombudsman; and make other minor consequential amendments.

In conclusion, the regulations provide the technical details to underpin the changes made by the Pensions Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 to streamline the process for occupational pension schemes being assessed for entry to the pension protection fund.

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is a pity that all social security legislation is not quite as straightforward. I am being so agreeable today that I am surprising myself. The Minister has explained the complexities of the regulation, and the Committee had the benefit of having it explained in detail by officials and had no problems with the regulations.

Mr McCausland: I am pleased that the Social Development Committee has agreed with the regulations, and I thank the Deputy Chair and the Committee for the positive way in which they have dealt with the matter. I was hoping that a new spirit of agreeability on those matters was breaking out, but it is obviously a temporary glitch. Having said that, I am happy, in the circumstances, to commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Pension Protection Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Committee Business

Government: AERC Report on Number of Departments

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

Mr Moutray (The Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee): I beg to move

That this Assembly notes the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its review of the number of Members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly and of the reduction in the number of Northern Ireland Departments: 'Part 2 - Reduction in the Number of Northern Ireland Departments'.

As Members will be aware, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland intends to introduce a Northern Ireland Bill in the third session of the current Parliament. The Bill will provide an opportunity to make changes to the Northern Ireland institutions where there is broad support among Assembly parties and where Westminster primary legislation would be required, such as future amendments to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC), therefore, asked the political parties and the independent Members of the Assembly for their priorities for the Committee's immediate review of Parts III and IV of the Northern Ireland Act within the available timescale set out by the Secretary of State for the proposed Northern Ireland Bill. Following consideration of the responses, the Committee agreed that its immediate review would cover the size of the Assembly and the number of Northern Ireland Departments. The Committee then agreed in the review's terms of reference that it would, first, report on the size of the Assembly by mid-June 2012 and then report on the number of Northern Ireland Departments in late October 2012.

As part of the overall review, the Committee identified five key issues. The first four of these issues were addressed in our part 1 report on the number of MLAs, which was debated and noted by the Assembly on 26 June of this year. The part 2 report focused on the fifth issue, which is:

"The reduction in the number of NI Government departments and associated re-allocation of functions which will ensure the effectiveness of the Executive functions is maintained."

In this part 2 review on the reduction in the number of Northern Ireland Departments, the Committee adopted a strategic approach. As such, it focused its consideration on three key areas: one, the objectives of the review and, therefore, the underlying objectives of any reorganisation of the Northern Ireland Departments; two, the areas of commonality in terms of future broad structures of reorganisation of Northern Ireland Departments between the different parties represented on the Committee; and, three, the question of what principles should underpin the arrangements for any reorganisation of Departments.

As part of the consideration of these three areas, the Committee also focused its attention on the costs, anticipated savings and effect on employment that would result from any suggested restructuring of Northern Ireland Departments. Members of the House will recall that, in our part 1 report, the Committee concluded that the five key issues that are identified as the focus of our overall review of the number of MLAs in the Assembly and the number of Northern Ireland Departments are very much interlinked and that a holistic approach should be taken. In this part 2 report, the Committee concluded that this holistic approach applies equally to key issue 5 on the reduction of the number of Northern Ireland Departments.

Through its discussions, the Committee has agreed an overall objective for its part 2 review:

“To bring forward recommendations on how a reduction in the number of NI Departments could secure more effective and efficient governance arrangements, including better co-ordination and collaboration within and between Departments and their Agencies, providing a better service and value for money for the public, consistent with the safeguards on inclusivity.”

Members, this objective also provides the objectives that should underpin any reorganisation of NI Departments, and, as such, can be used to inform any future reorganisation. Although the Committee did not reach consensus on how many Departments there should be, the report outlines five areas where the Committee agreed that there was some commonality with regard to how Departments could be restructured. As indicated in Assembly research papers, the task of reorganising government Departments is typically regarded as an Executive function. Therefore, the Committee regarded its role as advisory in this respect, rather than prescriptive. Indeed, the report clearly states that the five areas of commonality:

“do not represent an exhaustive list of broad reorganisations and cannot, therefore, be taken as a set of recommendations.”

However, as with the objectives to inform any future reorganisation, the Committee considers that the areas of commonality set out in the report can be used to directly inform any future reorganisation of Northern Ireland Departments.

The Assembly’s research service informed the Committee that identifying underpinning principles for government reorganisation in advance has proved to be a very good practice. Therefore, the report also includes a set of principles, six in all, that the Committee agreed should underpin the arrangements for any reorganisation of Departments. In addition to those principles, the Committee agreed conclusions on the issues of costs, savings, impact on employment and equality that should be considered in advance of any decision to reorganise Departments.

I highlight to Members that, in the ‘Committee Consideration’ section and appendix 4 of this report, the views of all other stakeholders who responded to the Committee, including those of the other political parties in the Assembly, are set out in some detail. As I said in relation to the Committee’s part 1 report of this review, the

way forward is now for the Assembly’s political parties, through the First and the deputy First Minister, to decide.

On behalf of the Committee, I acknowledge and thank the Committee staff for their valuable work and support during the review. I also thank Assembly research staff, legal advisers and Hansard staff for their valuable work. The Assembly and Executive Review Committee requests that the Assembly notes the Committee’s report.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Sinn Féin wants any arrangements that we have in place to ensure that we have the best governance and democracy in this part of Ireland. Good governance means equality for all and inclusivity.

During direct rule, there was a complete absence of any democracy with direct rule ministers. That is why Sinn Féin ensured that any structures that were agreed within our political framework prescribed by the Good Friday Agreement would guarantee inclusivity and power sharing. The number of MLAs — 108, as we know — was chosen to ensure that smaller parties had a voice. The outworking of the Good Friday Agreement is that it ensures that, in constituencies where there is a significant nationalist majority, like my own constituency of South Down or Newry and Armagh or others, unionism has its political representatives elected to the House. It is the same where nationalists are in a minority. That is to be welcomed. Obviously, any reduction would have to be carefully weighed up against whether that balance is affected.

We also have a very inclusive Executive. When there were 10 Departments, four parties held Ministries; five when policing and justice powers were devolved. Any reduction in the number of Departments would have to be weighed against its impact on power sharing, and when I speak of power sharing, I mean genuine power sharing. Obviously, this House is not interested in tokenism.

Níl na costais againn go fóill. Creideann Sinn Féin go gcaithfidh an Coiste an obair sin a dhéanamh.

We still do not have the costs of any suggested new arrangements, and that is one of the key areas where Sinn Féin believes more work can and should be done. It is one of the areas where we suggested that work should be done in the Committee. Some members of the Committee assume that merging Departments will save money. That may be the case but, equally, it may not. Real reform and change costs money and that is why, in other areas of reform, the Executive have had to prioritise money to invest to save. So, obviously, we need detailed costings in relation to that.

It is interesting that the SDLP and UUP do not know what they want. One minute, they want to pull out of the Executive and go into opposition, while others among their members want to stay. The song —

Mr Beggs: With the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: I will, yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that Sinn Féin was very reluctant to say anything during the entire period when the Committee met numerous times?

Ms Ruane: Sinn Féin has always put its opinions on every aspect. However, the point I was making — the Member interrupted me in the middle of it — was that, one minute, the SDLP and the UUP, his party, want to be in opposition,

or certain wings of them do, and the next they do not. They want to stay in the Executive. The song 'Lanigan's Ball' comes to mind. It is time for them to declare their hand, and it is the same with the SDLP. Obviously, their decision will impact on any final configuration. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Ms Ruane: I will repeat that, because the SDLP Member was laughing so loudly that people did not hear what I said. It is hard to be heard here. The SDLP and UUP do not know what they want to do with regard to opposition. They need to declare their hand. Obviously, any decision that is taken will impact upon any final configuration. So, it will be interesting —

12.30 pm

Mr McDevitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is a serious point. This debate is not about the opposition report: we started that work last week, and we will not report on that for another three or four months. This is about the number of Departments, Mr Speaker, just on a point of order.

Mr Speaker: Order. I take the Member's point of order. Let us get back to the motion before the House.

Ms Ruane: I am very aware that we are not discussing opposition arrangements, but the point that I am making, if the Member would listen, is that, obviously, any decision in relation to opposition will have an impact on the number of Departments. Obviously, these are very difficult times. People are struggling from one day to the next with bills, and Sinn Féin is very keen to save the public any money and to have the most efficient arrangements in place. We also want the public to have full confidence in the political system. If we needed any reminders of why we need good governance, equality and strong institutions, we got that over the past week.

We had a situation in the past where people were double- and triple-jobbing. Indeed, when the Executive had to discuss key issues on local government reform, Ministers had to leave the table on grounds of conflict of interest. That is not good governance. Sinn Féin has taken decisive action. Some parties are still double-jobbing. They know who they are. Indeed, it is the majority of parties in the House, and that needs to be dealt with. In my view, it is bad for the public when there is not good governance. Sinn Féin wants to see the review of public administration (RPA) happen. It is important that we have good, effective and fair local government structures, and that there is real devolution to local authorities.

We are in a far better place than we were pre the Good Friday Agreement. We will not go back to the bad old days of the past.

Tá a lán oibre le déanamh againn, agus tá Sinn Féin réidh le héisteacht le gach moladh. There is a lot of work to be done, and Sinn Féin is open to listening to all proposals. Sinn Féin will keep an open mind. We will be active members of the Committee, as we have been, and we urge others to do so as well.

Mr Beggs: First, I put on record my unequivocal condemnation of the attack on the office of Stewart Dickson, a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee, and the other attacks and threats that have been made against other public representatives.

I turn now to the AERC's report on the reduction of the number of Northern Ireland Departments. During the discussions, my colleagues in the Ulster Unionist Party and I have been focused on delivering better public services and producing improved responsiveness to meet the needs of the public and to make the best use of the limited resources available.

When looking at the departmental structures, we highlighted the fact that it was not just about the Departments; it was also about the agencies and arm's-length bodies that exist alongside and below the Departments. There is the cost of running any Department. There is the ministerial cost, the cost of the permanent secretary and the central headquarters' staff, and, if that can be reduced, a small saving can be released to go towards additional front line services for nurses, doctors, teachers or whatever. However, the way of bringing about potential major improvement in cost is in removing inefficiencies that may exist in our system.

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

All parties recognise that Health, Education and Justice are major Departments that deal with fairly specific areas and that there is limited room for improvement. Yes, there is interaction, and there are undoubtedly areas for improvement at the edges, but, principally, those are large Departments with core functions, and that would need to continue.

However, let us look at the range of other things that have impacted on the public. Let us look at flooding. Most flooding is the result of our streams, rivers and culverts being overburdened or blockages occurring, which results in flooding downstream. The responsibility for that lies with the Rivers Agency in the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The Department for Regional Development's (DRD) Roads Service has an input to ensure that the gratings on our roads are kept free so that flooding does not occur. Northern Ireland Water, which is linked to DRD, has a responsibility for sewers. In our older systems, there are combined sewerage systems in which some surface water is linked with sewage. If flooding occurs, we have the dreadful situation of sewage flowing along our streets and possibly even into our houses. There is obviously a role for that Department.

The way in which we are fragmented does not help with planning issues because, frequently, new developments upstream cause problems downstream. If there were an increased focus and responsibility, we might have better planning.

There is also flood line, which takes phone calls and directs people to Roads Service, NI Water and, perhaps, the councils for help. The Department of Finance and Personnel provides that service. We need to make things work better together to produce better outcomes and clear lines of accountability and responsibility. That is one of our suggestions. It is not only about Departments but about the range of bodies that exist below them.

We advocate that improvements could be made through a single Department of the economy. That was proposed some time ago by the independent review of economic policy. The idea is for an even greater focus on the economy to ensure that we are all pushing in the right direction and working for the optimum benefit to create greater job opportunities for everyone. The

recommendation has been there for some time, but we seem to be slow in bringing about change. Improvement is definitely needed.

I will now move to fishing. The Department of Agriculture is responsible for fish farming, but angling is the responsibility of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL). They are all fish, and one clear line in a Department should be looking after fishing.

The Committee's recommendations refer to non-overlaps, grouping functions together, administrative efficiencies —

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

Mr Beggs: — the need for cost-benefit analysis, planned and timely decisions and, most importantly, services being customer facing. We must look at the needs of the public and ensure that we provide better services.

Mr McDevitt: I join the Chair and colleagues in thanking the Research and Information Service, Legal Services and our Committee staff for their work in preparing the reports for the House. As the Chair pointed out, this is the second of three reports that we are due to present to the House on different aspects of potential structural reform inside our institutions.

It was most frustrating to be party to the preparation of the report, largely because there was very little willingness on behalf of a significant party to engage in any serious way in any aspect of debate around the issue.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. Rather than the Member referring to “a significant party”, I encourage him to be very precise — perhaps he was about to be precise. If he is not precise, I will be.

Mr McDevitt: I will leave Mr Campbell to his own precision. Sinn Féin was the party that failed to make a substantial response to the consultation process that kicks off each of these periods of internal debate. I respect Sinn Féin's right not to make a response, but it devalues the robustness of the report and, in my opinion, undermines the credibility of the AERC process, which ultimately undermines the credibility of the House.

What were we being asked to think about? We were being asked to think about the structure of government from the Departments' point of view. The SDLP does not see this as a numbers debate, but I respect the fact that others do. I respect the fact that others have a fixed number of Departments in mind, and, for them, the best government would have, let us say, six or seven Departments. That is not the way that we come at the issue, and the report reflects our opinions. For us, it is about government meeting the needs of the people of this part of Ireland and having a form that follows its function, and respecting the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement, which make the maximum number of Departments quite clear and give a clear indication about the actual number of Departments.

We came to this process agreeing with the Ulster Unionist Party on the need for a single Department for the economy. It is a recommendation from the independent review of economic policy that we supported from the day that it was published and are happy to continue to support. We came with our own unique proposition, which was that we should think about establishing a Department for energy and sustainability to corral important cost factors in our economy: the production of energy; the development

of future energy sources; and the use and harnessing of energy in a more sustainable way. That would have included transport policy, aspects of rural development, etc. We said that we could do that without having to radically reduce the number of Departments because, for us, it is not about a number; it is about a series of Departments that better meets the needs of the people of Northern Ireland than our current Departments do.

We can make that contribution without in any way diluting our commitment to power sharing, without in any way undermining our position as equals in the House and without in any way giving even the slightest impression that we are departing one millimetre from the spirit and provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. In fact, we can do all this within the protections of the Good Friday Agreement.

In the next few months, we have work to do on a series of potentially controversial questions, but we should be capable of conducting that debate in an open and honest way. That does not mean that we have to find agreement, but we should not run away from having an opinion. What has been regrettable, and has undermined this process, is that people have exercised a right to silence. You might want to do that in the criminal justice system, but, in a parliamentary democracy, it just does not stand up to any credible scrutiny.

So my appeal to colleagues from all sides of the House, as we move to the next phase, is that we have the courage to put opinions on the table and not treat those opinions as political footballs or use them to pick holes in one another. I appeal to colleagues to have the courage to say to the DUP, the Ulster Unionist Party or, for that matter, the Alliance Party that we disagree with them about the number of Departments, but we will not run away from having a public debate on the issue.

Mr Dickson: I will make my contribution to the debate brief. First, I place on record my thanks to Roy Beggs for his kind remarks.

There has been some public comment about my attendance at AERC meetings, but, as Members will note, it meets on Tuesdays when plenary sittings in this place also take place. Therefore, it is quite difficult for a party that has stretched membership resources to be in two places at once. Notwithstanding that, I believe that the report from the Assembly and Executive Review Committee is broadly in line with the position taken by the Alliance Party and with our submissions to that review.

At this point, I note my disappointment that some parties did not take the opportunity to put forward, or fully put forward, their views on matters that were available to us for discussion or clearly on the table. Some full and detailed submissions were made to the Committee, but there were some notable blank spaces.

It is clear that the Assembly has an unsustainable and unnecessarily large number of Departments. What is clearer still is the need to deal with that in a wholesale and carefully considered manner on the basis of what will be the best outcomes for the future governance of Northern Ireland and value for money for its citizens.

The Alliance Party has made clear its preference for a move towards eight Departments. That should go hand in hand with a reduction in the number of MLAs. There are

issues about whether we remain coupled to or decouple from the Westminster parliamentary constituencies. That will be an ongoing debate.

I welcome the report and commend those who participated in the review in a meaningful way. However, I note that decisions on the matter will, ultimately, be taken at Executive and, dare I suggest, party leader level. I look forward to our next round of work and urge parties to fully engage in the work of AERC.

12.45 pm

Mr Campbell: I, as a member of the AERC, also commend my colleague Mr Stewart Dickson, given the exceptionally unfortunate, regrettable and unacceptable circumstances in which he found himself in the past week.

I will not waste too much time, because the issues are fairly clear. This was a very important Committee review. Given the climate in Northern Ireland at present — I am talking about the economic climate — there are not too many employers or employees who have the luxury of being able to carry out their working life and activities with more people or departments than they require. Very, very few are in that position. We are.

The Committee was set a number of tasks, one of which we are discussing, which is the interim report. Towards the back of the report, people can see the number of meetings that took place. There were well over 20 meetings. People were asked to put forward their proposals. Time after time after time after time after endless time, we put forward our proposals. One party did not: Sinn Féin.

Mr Sheehan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. To point a finger across the Chamber is very unparliamentary.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I think that all Members realise that that subject has been raised previously. It is not acceptable to point a finger. I ask the Member to continue with his speech.

Mr Campbell: One party did not: Sinn Féin. It did not elaborate or expand on any of its views. In fact — after about the twenty-third meeting — page 19 of the report states:

“At the meeting of 23 October, Party Representatives were asked to indicate whether they agreed with these suggested principles.”

That was after all those meetings had taken place and inordinate time and effort had gone into trying to get agreement. Eventually, we got commonality. After the Alliance Party’s representative had elaborated on what his party wanted, he said that he had “no difficulty” with the principles. The DUP spokesman said that he had “no issue” with the principles. The SDLP representative said that he was “content” with the principles. The Sinn Féin spokesperson said:

“Most of them appear to be worthy principles, although I would not like to see them set in stone just at the minute.”

That was after around 23 meetings had taken place. Let us not go too quickly, now. Let us not go too fast here. Let us not express our opinions. Let us not put our views forward, because we might actually be asked to defend and explain them. However, that is what Sinn Féin did.

Let us look at the areas of commonality. There are some sensible suggestions here on which the Committee needs to build. Just because we make progress at a snail’s pace does not mean that we throw the baby out with the bath water. But, neither does it mean that we have to consign ourselves to the continuation of the snail’s pace, because, at this rate, it will be 2050 by the time that we get to the point at which most people out there want us to be, which is to ask, “Have we too many Departments?” Of course, we have too many Departments. Nobody can defend the number of Departments that we have, whatever partial justification Sinn Féin tries to throw up about equality. There will be equality whether there are seven Departments or 12. No one denies that. No one seriously suggests that we are going to live with 12 Departments. Let us get on with it.

If we are saying that we are not entitled to an expansive 108-Member Assembly, spell out how many Members you think you do want. Again, that party seems to be incapable of spelling out how many it wants. I do not know why it keeps running away from reality. Last Monday night, it got a reality call at Belfast City Hall. The sooner that it gets that reality call every night and every day —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Mr Campbell: — from now on, the better.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to resume his seat. I remind him to stick to the subject of the debate that is under discussion. I also ask him to address his remarks through the Chair.

Mr Sheehan: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Mr Campbell’s partial condemnation of the attack on Mr Dickson’s office earlier in the week rings a bit hollow after his utterances.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is also veering off the subject. I ask Mr Campbell to continue the debate.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Deputy Speaker. I will continue. I thought that I was addressing through the Chair, and I will continue to do so. Hopefully, people will smell the coffee after last week’s decision at Belfast City Council.

I think that we need to make progress and we need to make it rapidly, so that we have more than just areas of commonality. When people look at this report and at the 23 or whatever number of meetings there were, they will say, “Can we not have a bit more than just commonality? Let us get some sort of agreement on a cost-effective, efficient system of government here, which is what everyone outside has to have.”

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before calling the next Member, I advise the House that there will be no latitude in the discussion. We discuss the report that is before us. End of story.

Mr Givan: True to form, the plenary debate about the AERC report is more exciting than the Committee meetings. When we go through all this, we see that it certainly was a frustrating process. I am not going to repeat what my colleagues said. I think that Sinn Féin did no credit to those on the Committee who are capable of putting forward positions and who, I have no doubt, are able to defend them but, for whatever reason, did not.

It worries me that that side of the House seems to have some kind of paranoia about a hidden hand somewhere

and about all this work somehow diluting equality and inclusivity, and attempting to undermine power sharing. That is not and never was what this is about. It is about how you can get the most effective and efficient government for the people of Northern Ireland. The Member for South Belfast Mr McDevitt made that very point. This is about delivering services to the people, and that is how we should approach it. That is what government, first and foremost, is there to do — deliver services to the people. How best can you do that within the structures of government? How best can you co-ordinate and collaborate it? How do you drive that, while, of course, providing value for money?

So, efficiency is important, but so is the effectiveness of government. This piece of work was about creating an effective government. We as a party made it clear that, we feel, there could be greater effectiveness in driving forward decisions on big issues. How can you do that within a government of 12 Departments? Would it be better achieved with eight or, indeed, six Departments? We pitched the suggestion that we would be content with somewhere in that range.

I suppose that there is one element of this that we can be pleased with, and that is the fact that, despite Sinn Féin's lack of input, we got to the point where parties broadly came to the conclusion that a reduction in Departments is necessary. Mr Campbell made the point that people expect that to happen because, in the real world, people have to cut the cloth to suit the current environment.

Mr McDevitt: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I certainly will give way to Mr McDevitt.

Mr McDevitt: For the benefit of the House: Mr Givan knows well that there is consensus that we need to organise government better and that many Departments certainly do not meet the need of the people. However, I think it is fair to say that there was not a consensus at the Committee that that can be achieved only through a smaller number. I think we have made it quite clear that we do not necessarily see the need to reduce the number in any significant way, but we do see the need to reorganise stuff.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an additional minute.

Mr Givan: Thank you. We are now teasing out the nuanced positions that people hold. The report is pretty clear: there is commonality around the number of Departments. I think that parties clearly need to take a firm position, so that there is not some sort of pretence put out to the public that we are doing something. We need to get on with this and do it. I would be worried if the SDLP was now trying to manoeuvre itself a little bit on that.

Members rightly pointed out that this is interlinked with other issues, such as the reduction in the number of MLAs, and how that would impact on how the Assembly does its business and on Committee roles. I think it is important that we take forward the report. The initial scoping work has been carried out at length, so we can now get on with ultimately making decisions and showing that this place can bring forward an outworking of the arrangements discussed at length in Committee and make that a reality.

Mr McCallister: I was relieved to hear the Member who spoke previously say that the plenary was more exciting than the Committee. Being a relatively recent member of the Committee, I have enjoyed the past months, meeting

every few weeks to hear members of Sinn Féin tell us absolutely nothing. It was always a breath of fresh air going into the meetings.

I want to address several things that came up during the debate. It was probably a little strange to hear Ms Ruane talk about double-jobbing and bringing an end to it when, in 2010, she wanted to double-job. Thankfully, the good people of South Down knew to send Margaret Ritchie to Westminster and not Ms Ruane.

It is, Mr Deputy Speaker —

Ms Ruane: As the Member knows, we have an abstentionist policy in relation to Westminster.

Mr McCallister: Oh, sorry, an abstentionist policy. Yes, and that has served the people well when they continue to talk about welfare reform but will not turn up to vote on it. So, it is a little rich to mention that policy, and the people in South Down quite rightly rejected that very idea.

This debate is very much about how you deliver better government, services and outcomes for people. We have all sat here through many debates when we all heard the call for better government, better joined-up government and more collaboration and co-operation between Departments. Health, social services and education need to work together to get a common policy objective and some sense around the Executive table of a collective responsibility that is so lacking at this time. You need that, which is why we have called for a proper Programme for Government to be developed as soon as possible after an election, even before d'Hondt is run. That way you could get a collective responsibility and have an Executive running and driving policy in broadly the same direction. That is what this report is and should be about: how you deliver better services for the people who send us here.

We talked about eight Departments. My colleague Mr Beggs mentioned a single Department of the economy. We think that is hugely important because our unemployment levels are rising and our youth unemployment rates are appalling. Those are areas that we must tackle to get our economy back up and moving. In Great Britain, they managed to create many more jobs in the private sector over the past couple of years than we were able to create here. We must look at that and at where we are failing. Broadly, there has been agreement around a single Department of the economy.

As for the Department of the Environment, with planning, in particular, moving into local government with the RPA reform, we see it moving into the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. A total of 80% of the budget for the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure goes through arm's-length bodies anyway, so you have to question the purpose of and need for that Department.

In response to David McNarry, the Health Department is just too important to leave off the list. We will certainly not be supporting leaving it off the list. We would have it firmly up there as one of the most important Departments.

Mr Deputy Speaker: On a point of order.

Mr McNarry: Just to make a correction, I remind the Member that I have not made any speech about health in recent times. Maybe he will clarify.

Mr McCallister: Well, Mr Deputy Speaker, he could have done that simply by asking for an intervention. I know that

he has not spoken, and that is maybe why he left it off his list of Departments. It was in the report and his response to that; health was not mentioned in his list of Departments. It is just too important to leave off that list.

1.00 pm

The Committee continues to do its work by looking at opposition. With the Deputy Speaker's guidance, I will not attempt to respond to Ms Ruane's remarks about opposition. We have a very clear direction: we would like to see it created. This is about government delivering better services for the people who send us here. We should never lose sight of that. We should engage in a much more positive way; I think that the vast majority of parties have done that in this process. We should get on with the work that we have been tasked with.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the publication of the report. I thank the Chairperson and the Deputy Chairperson for steering us through our meetings; I think that somebody said that there were 23. I am not sure how many meetings there were, but, whatever the number, I thank the staff for servicing us in the way that they did throughout the debate.

I add my best wishes to Stewart Dickson. He was absent last week from the Justice Committee. All those on the Justice Committee wish him well.

I have perhaps the unique distinction of having been a member of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee since its inception, throughout the previous mandate. On a number of occasions, we had to bring reports to the Assembly, most notably on the transfer of policing and justice. The same type of suggestions and depressing views were put across the Chamber. It was said that it was not a good report and that perhaps it could have been better. Depressing language was used. We said then, and we say again, that the report will inform the debate as we take it forward. We will be guided and steered by the principles of inclusiveness and representativeness. Other people have made a commitment in their party manifestos to deliver this. Perhaps that is the haste, urge and need. We will not be guided by other party manifestos. We will take decisions that are best. The decisions will be made at the appropriate time. We will not be bounced by anybody.

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Surely.

Mr Campbell: If the Member thinks that 23 meetings is acting in haste, how many meetings would he say is taking your time?

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member has an extra minute.

Mr McCartney: I am not sure how many meetings the Assembly and Executive Review Committee had about policing and justice. We were patient then, and we will be patient again. The Member was one of the people who, at the time, did not talk about 23 meetings, which, I assume, were in less than six months. Remember that we were told then that it would not happen in a political lifetime, 20 political lifetimes, 50 political lifetimes —

Mr Campbell: Yes; a Sinn Féin Justice Minister.

Mr McCartney: — or 100 political lifetimes.

Mr Campbell: That is right: a Sinn Féin Justice Minister.

Mr McCartney: However, it happened. It happened because we brought reasoned debate to the Committee and the Assembly. The right decision was made at the right time. That is how it will happen here. I am not sure what was meant by this, but it is worth reminding people that it was said that we got some sort of reality call last Monday night in Belfast City Hall —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have reminded Members twice that we are not going off the report that we are discussing. I also ask other Members not to shout across the Floor. The Member will resume.

Mr McCartney: I accept what the Chair said, but, sometimes, when something is said, there needs to be the right to reply. I am not sure —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind the Member not to challenge the Chair. I have made my ruling.

Mr McCartney: I am not challenging, nor do I intend to challenge, the Chair. I just wanted to point out that, sometimes, the right to reply should be allowed in these circumstances.

This always happens in these types of situations: when someone puts a proposition on the table, they sometimes back it up with a theory. However, theories work only if there are facts. I could say, "Time after time after time", and maybe I could raise my voice and point across the Chamber and use invective, but the reality is that not once throughout the 23 meetings were we told that fewer Departments meant less money being spent and better value for money. Not once were we told that. The contention that reducing the number of Departments would save money was not backed up.

Indeed, neither the researchers, the Assembly staff, the witnesses or any of the parties that now lecture us about not saying enough were able to prove that fewer Departments would save money. It is not there to be proven. As a matter of fact, most people said that, if anything, it was cost-neutral. That sort of spurious idea —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Yes.

Mr Beggs: Does the Member accept that, on occasion, some things almost go unsaid? There is a cost to having a Minister. There is a cost to a ministerial car. There is a cost to a permanent secretary and to Ministers having their own staff. When there is an obvious cost, there has to be a benefit.

Mr McCartney: The Member makes my point: it is so obvious that it could not be made. The Committee asked the researchers to prove the case that fewer Departments meant less money, and they told us that there was no case to be made and that it was not true. It cannot be made to be true.

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr McCartney for giving up his time. I sympathise with his argument because it is consistent with mine. So I put this question to him: why not join the debate about improving the structure in government without changing the number of Departments? That is why I was disappointed with Sinn Féin. It could have supported the argument that I presented in Committee, but instead

I am the only voice recorded as having presented that argument.

Mr McCartney: Despite being accused of saying nothing in Committee — as someone once put it, we reserved our right to silence — we said that, in principle, we were not opposed to a reduction in the number of Departments but we remained to be convinced. We remain to be convinced because too many people rushed in, first, to deliver on their party manifesto and, secondly, to make claims that were not true. I will say it again: the claim that fewer Departments means less money and better value for money was not proven. All the parties that made that claim had the ability and the chance to challenge the analysis that was brought to the Committee —

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

Mr McCartney: — and they did not do it.

Mr Hamilton: To listen to the tone of the debate, you would think that the Assembly and Executive Review Committee did not actually agree on something. I am also a bit of a veteran of the Committee; I have been a member for some five years. I do not know what I have done to deserve that punishment and exile to the Committee, but I recall several reports coming through from that Committee — Mr McCartney will remember them as well, as will other Members — including those on policing and justice and, more recently, the number of Assembly Members. On each occasion, we were rightly criticised in the Chamber for not having any degree of commonality or agreement across the parties. We have had agreement on some of them but not agreement that encompassed all parties and all members on the Committee. Here is an exception: this report has been agreed by all 11 Committee members and, therefore, by all five parties represented on the Committee and in the Executive. So progress has been made on this issue in a way that it has not been made on others, in that there is agreement on areas of commonality, right from the initial objective of the inquiry, which was to see how a reduction in the number of Departments could increase effectiveness and efficiency — not keeping the status quo or increasing the number of Departments. We also have agreement on areas of commonality, such as everyone agreeing that seven Departments should be consistent in any Executive moving forward in the Assembly. It is not total agreement or precise agreement on the final number of Departments, but, in those areas of commonality, there are not a lot of powers remaining that need to be allocated to other Departments.

Even if it is not explicitly said, it is pretty clear that there is agreement that a smaller number of Departments is right for Northern Ireland. There is certainly no definitive agreement on where certain powers should go, which, as Mr Campbell keeps reminding the Committee, is a decision that is above our pay grade. The leaders of our respective parties and the Executive must agree the final number and where powers should be allocated. However, there is significant commonality across the five parties and the 11 members on the Committee, which stands for something. You might ask why, after years of disagreement on the issue, significant commonality has been found at this time, but it has been argued for over a decade since 1999, when political expediency won out over economic sense and efficiency, that Northern Ireland has had government that is too big and too bloated. That is unjustifiable at any time but is particularly so when we live in austere times.

Mr McCartney mentioned that there was no proof that a reduction would lead to savings. It is self-evident that a reduction in the number of Departments would realise savings. I appreciate — I am not silly — that there would be initial costs in reorganising government, but there would be savings in the long term. The Member's colleague — she is not in her place now — sits on the Committee. She spoke in October 2010, when she was still Education Minister and pushing for the creation of the Education and Skills Authority. Her argument was:

"What I want to do is use the money I fight for in the best possible way, and I don't want it squandered".

She was talking about money being squandered on five education and library boards as opposed to having the Education and Skills Authority. If it works in education and education administration, it will work across the whole of the Executive and the Departments here at Stormont.

I have always made the point that it is not just about savings, although I believe that savings would be realised in the longer term. It is also about having effective government here in Northern Ireland. It stands to reason that, if you bring powers together, you become more effective. Mr Beggs talked about flooding, which is a prime example. Three agencies spread across two Departments deal with similar but different aspects of flooding response. Town centre regeneration spans at least three Departments, sometimes more, as well as local authorities. The Environment Minister recently established in his Department a marine directorate that does not control everything to do with the marine environment. There are any number of areas in which there is a disconnect and disjointedness in how policy set by the Assembly is implemented by the Departments responsible. People in Northern Ireland are poorer as a result because they do not get as effective a government as they deserve.

It is about making savings, and I think that those would be realised, but it is not just about that. That is not even the paramount issue. Yes, it is about having smaller government, but it is also about getting smarter government. For too long, people in this part of the world have had the luxury of government that is too big and too bloated and has not delivered for them in the way that they deserve.

Mr Allister: This is a farcical report. In fact, it is a non-report, because, despite everything that the Member who just spoke sought to say, it does not advance us with an agreement on a reduction in the number of Departments. At its height, the very best that it can do is to talk about something that broadly reflects a view on how Departments could be reorganised — not how they should be or will be reorganised but how they could be reorganised. That hardly moves us at all from the base of the issue.

The report goes out of its way to make it plain that it contains no recommendations. That, of course, as we have heard, is because, yet again, of the feet-dragging veto of Sinn Féin. It seems from what we hear from the Committee that, many, many times, they simply have nothing to say. It is quite clear that old habits die hard. They have nothing to say, and, of course, in saying nothing, they exercise the veto that lies at the very heart of these Belfast Agreement arrangements and torpedoes the very promises falsely and deceptively made by some. Just give it a little time, and we

will work all sorts of changes. We will have a marvellous efficiency review committee or some such grand title — an efficiency review panel. It has not even been appointed, the report tells us. We will see the structures of government changed and democratised so that you do not have to live with a mandatory coalition and not having an opposition because we, some told us, will change all that. Now it emerges that they cannot even change something as neutral as the number of Departments. They cannot change it because of the belligerent veto of Sinn Féin. That same belligerent veto guarantees that they will not change the things they really made promises about, such as creating an opposition and getting a voluntary coalition. They have surrendered the same veto to the same belligerents, who will make sure that it does not happen. Therefore, we go through a farce — this is another part of it — in which Members, particularly those in the DUP, preen themselves and pretend that change is on the way. They say that they control Stormont, but we see today who controls Stormont: those who can feet-drag even on the neutral issue of the number of Departments.

1.15 pm

The report is also farcical because, in the context of allegedly giving advice to the Secretary of State about a Bill that she is going to bring forward, it deals with an issue that is not even a Westminster issue. The reduction in the number of Departments is not within the gift of Westminster; it is within the gift of OFMDFM. The report, as part of that process, is farcical also. I also note that when, as part of that feet-dragging, the Committee went looking for help from OFMDFM — the primary Department of government — according to paragraph 62 of the report, it refused evidence from its officials. The Committee then wrote to OFMDFM about costings and got no reply. That, of course, is the Department that, at the beginning of 2012, beat its chest and told us that it would deal with DEL and would:

“Ask officials to make arrangements to prepare the necessary Assembly legislation to abolish the Department of Employment and Learning and transfer its functions.”

A few months later, it was eating its words and backing away. That was another promise of change and of a reduction in bureaucracy and the number of Departments that went by the wayside.

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

Mr Allister: The report is in the same vogue. It is a waste of time.

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

Mr Agnew: In its manifesto and in a submission to the Committee, the Green Party outlined that we would like to see a reduction in the number of Departments. Some talk about smaller government, but we are more interested in efficient government and better outcomes. We certainly believe that, as some Members pointed out, the number of Departments, with responsibilities for single issues shared across Departments, is not in keeping with good governance. Good governance has to be at the heart of any position on the issue, just like it has to be for the number of MLAs. It should be based not on party self-interest but on how best we deliver government to the

people of Northern Ireland. Indeed, I have been working on a private Member's Bill to seek to improve how we co-operate across government in the current system to deliver services to children and young people. I hope that those who have talked about good governance today will work with me in that endeavour.

The Chair of the Committee said that now was the time for political parties to make decisions. Other Members said that parties should take away the report and party leaders should make decisions. The AERC is a public and transparent Committee and was designed specifically for parties to have these discussions. We should not move a public discussion behind closed doors, where there will always be the public perception that deals have been done. Any such decisions will lack confidence.

Furthermore, although we need to find common ground around these issues and, where we have common ground, build on it, ultimately these institutions were created by the Good Friday Agreement or, as it was dubbed at the time, the “people's agreement”. If we propose to make major changes to it — some would suggest that we have already done so — it is my view and that of my party that we should do so with the consent of the people whose agreement we are discussing. My first ever vote was in the referendum vote on that agreement, and I know that it was taken incredibly seriously in my household, as it was in many others. We should be mindful of that in these discussions. We see in the current —

Mr Beggs: Will the Member give way?

Mr Agnew: Sure.

Mr Beggs: In the referendum that you referred to, the Belfast Agreement etc, the legislation indicated that there was a maximum number of Departments. It did not state that you could not go for a smaller number, so, in reducing the number of Departments, we are not breaching anything that was agreed at that time.

Mr Agnew: I thank the Member for his intervention. I appreciate that, but we are talking about completely changing the structures and numbers of the Assembly. When I talk about putting it back to the people, I do so in the context of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee's whole review. While I appreciate that this one aspect of it may not contravene the agreement, other aspects of it may do, if firm proposals are made. Ultimately, where politicians fail to get agreement, we can put a multi-optional position to the electorate. Where we fail to agree, we should ask the electorate what they believe the institutions should look like. Ultimately, it is their lives we seek to govern.

We have seen that happening with the Irish constitutional convention, where there are proposals to change the constitution in the Irish Republic. There has been a serious attempt to engage with members of the public. I am honoured to represent the Green Party in that convention. Just as I spoke earlier today about being proud to be British because of many of the institutions of Britishness, I am, in that regard, equally proud to be Irish and to take part in a democratic and effective way of engaging with the public. I said in part of the submission to that convention that the Northern Ireland Assembly can learn from how the Government of the Republic of Ireland have sought to engage with the people. Essentially, the Good Friday Agreement is the nearest thing that we have to a

constitution, and we must go back to the people. There must be a time when politicians are clear on what the questions are but go to the people of Northern Ireland for the answers.

Mr Sheehan (The Deputy Chairperson of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I have been on the Assembly and Executive Review Committee for about two years. This is the greatest excitement I have encountered in that time. *[Laughter.]* I will rise above all the catcalling that has gone on today and stick to my role as Deputy Chair.

As I said of the Committee's part 1 report on this review, this report represents part fulfilment of the matters referred to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee by Standing Order 59, which provides for the Committee to make a report to the British Secretary of State, the Assembly and the Executive Committee by no later than 1 May 2015 on the operation of Parts III and IV of the NI Act 1998.

As the Chairperson said, no consensus could be reached by the Committee on the reduced number of Departments. However, the report usefully sets out in some detail the position of the political parties represented on the Committee and includes objectives that should underpin any reorganisation of Departments; five areas of commonality that can be used to inform any future reorganisation of Departments; six principles that should underpin the arrangements for any reorganisations of Departments; and further principles on costs, savings, impact on employment and equality for consideration in advance of any decision to reorganise Departments. The Committee considers that those conclusions should aid the final decisions on the restructuring of Departments.

I do not propose to go through Members' contributions today, except to say that we have had a mature and constructive debate in Committee. We have agreed important principles, and there is a need to take the debate forward. I thank Members for their contributions. I also thank the Committee staff, the Research and Information Service staff and other Assembly staff who assisted the Committee in its review and in the production of this report. As the Chairperson of the Committee said, the way forward is now for the Assembly's political parties, through the First Minister and deputy First Minister, to decide. Finally, I ask the Assembly to note the Committee's report.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes the report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its review of the number of Members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly and of the reduction in the number of Northern Ireland Departments: 'Part 2 - Reduction in the Number of Northern Ireland Departments'.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business on the Order Paper is Question Time. I therefore propose, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm.

The sitting was suspended at 1.25 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Beggs] in the Chair) —

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Education

Lisanelly Shared Education Campus, Omagh

1. **Mrs Cochrane** asked the Minister of Education to what extent the Lisanelly shared educational campus will be shared. (AQO 3049/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Executive's Programme for Government 2011-15 is committed to the creation of a shared education campus on the Lisanelly site for some 3,700 post-primary pupils, together with provision for pupils with special educational needs through the relocation of Arvalee School & Resource Centre. It is envisaged that the campus will involve a range of schools from different sectors, with different ranges of ability, coming together on the same site in Omagh. Plans currently under development propose a number of core schools relocating to the campus, where each core school will retain its own identity. Pupils at Key Stage 4 and beyond will have the opportunity to be taught together in shared, innovative centres.

Mrs Cochrane: I thank the Minister for his answer. Given that Drumragh Integrated College was refused an extension, is there any rationale for not having the local integrated post-primary school there as a catalyst?

Mr O'Dowd: The post-primary integrated school in Omagh is a relatively new building. That is the most pertinent reason not to relocate it to the Lisanelly site. It is an excellent building; indeed, Drumragh is an excellent school. That is one reason why we would not want to move it at this time. It has all the resources required to run a modern post-primary education centre. So, I have no intention of moving it to the Lisanelly site at this time.

Mr Storey: Given the recent court judgement on the challenge Loreto Grammar School made on its newbuild, will the Minister tell the House what discussions his Department has had since the appeal on how the issue will be moved forward? Does he believe that schools under the authority of orders, or the maintained sector, are now committed to the project in Omagh?

Mr O'Dowd: It is now several months since the court judgement on the appeal took place. Since then, area planning has been in place. All schools, and indeed the community, should have been involving themselves in area planning discussions as to how we move forward.

The Lisanelly site is a Programme for Government commitment. I think that it is a good Programme for Government commitment. Although the area planning consultation responses have to be evaluated in relation to Omagh, I remain committed to the Lisanelly site. There would have to be a very, very good reason as to why a school or group of schools would not want to move to the Lisanelly site. I think that it is an innovative way forward. It allows schools from different sectors to come together. It allows them to retain their identity. It allows them to bring

forward the shared educational needs of our community, which are reinforced by the Programme for Government. As I said, there would have to be a very, very good reason why a school would not want to move to the Lisanelly site for that to obtain my agreement.

Mr McAleer: Will the Minister update us on the relocation of the Arvalee school to the Lisanelly site following the fire at Arvalee school?

Mr O'Dowd: Members will be aware that, on Friday 31 August, a fire at Arvalee school caused extensive damage, resulting in its closure and the temporary relocation of pupils to neighbouring provision. The Arvalee site has since been cleared, and work is under way to reinstate the school on its original site, with pupils returning, hopefully, in or around March 2013.

Plans for the newbuild accommodation for Arvalee have been advanced to design stage C on the Lisanelly shared education campus, and an outline business case was recently received by the Department. Given recent events, officials from my Department have been working closely with the board to explore options to advance the Arvalee project as a stand-alone project on the Lisanelly site. Indeed, Arvalee could be one of the first schools to move to the Lisanelly site. I think that that in itself will give impetus to the project.

When the community around Omagh sees actual building work starting on the Lisanelly site, I think that that will encourage other schools that are still deciding where to go. It will encourage them to see that the Lisanelly site is a real project and is happening. I would like to see Arvalee move as soon as possible.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What other campuses are planning shared locations?

Mr O'Dowd: The boards are studying the responses to the area plans. I suspect that, through the area-planning consultation process, the boards and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), we will see other examples of shared educational campuses across the North. From the point of view of resources and community cohesion and building, it makes sense that our educational campuses come together on one site so that communities are, for the first time, sharing educational resources. That would be a good example for our education system. The consultation responses are being examined, from which I hope that we will see more examples of sites that have the same potential as Lisanelly.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. Will he state how advanced the formal and informal negotiations on the project are with the three grammar schools and the other post-primary schools? There is a feeling that a greater emphasis is needed on the educational needs and requirements associated with the project.

Mr O'Dowd: The educational needs of young people in the Omagh area are at the very core of the project. That is advanced in the sense that there is also a community development proposal in the project: for the first time, we will bring the schools of Omagh together on one site. I thought that everyone would have welcomed that, that the project was a no-brainer and that we would be much further advanced in the negotiations.

The area-planning consultation process has been completed. That was the formal negotiation in the Omagh area. Those plans are being studied, but, as I said to the Chair of the Education Committee, there would need to be a very good reason for me, as Education Minister, to agree to the building of a new school anywhere other than on the Lisanelly site. It is a former British military site that is in the hands of the Executive. There is an onus on the Executive to develop it. It is a Programme for Government commitment to develop the site, and there are a lot of national and international interests in it. So if we can get things right on the site, it will open up opportunities for education and investment in the future, nationally and internationally.

Primary Schools: Irish Language

2. **Mr McElduff** asked the Minister of Education how he intends to work with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to promote further the Irish language in primary schools. (AQO 3050/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to enhancing the use of the Irish language in schools and communities that wish to be involved. I very much welcome the progress that has been made by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL) in publishing its strategy for protecting and enhancing the development of the Irish language. I recognise and support the importance and the contribution of education to that, and I am keen that my Department play its full part in contributing to that work.

During a recent joint visit to St John the Baptist Primary School in Portadown with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, I announced an additional funding scheme to be delivered as part of the extended schools programme, which will help to promote learning and awareness of the Irish language. The scheme will complement the Culture Minister's Lófa initiative, which aims to encourage 5,000 people from all walks of life to become fluent in Irish by 2015. I have made £230,000 available in the 2012-13 financial year to support the scheme, with the intention of continuing that funding over the next two years. The additional resources will enable extended schools cluster groups across all school sectors to apply for funding to provide programmes that support pupils, parents and the wider community in developing their skills in the use of Irish.

My Department also funds a number of educational initiatives to support primary schools and pupils in learning the Irish language, such as the primary languages programme, which gives pupils at foundation stage and Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language at school. It also funds the Gaeláras Léargas pilot programme, which provides Key Stage 2 pupils in the Derry area with an opportunity to develop their knowledge of Irish language and culture.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answer. Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabháil leis an Aire as ucht a fhreagra. Will he give some additional detail about the success or otherwise in the take-up of the Léargas programme that has been initiated in Derry?

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist, a Chomhalta. There has been an increased demand for Irish-language programmes, with more and more young people becoming interested in learning the indigenous

language of the island. The Léargas pilot programme was announced by Minister Ruane in 2011, and it aims to provide Key Stage 2 pupils in the Derry area with an opportunity to develop their knowledge of Irish language and culture. The programme, which is scheduled to run for four years, commenced in 10 primary schools in the north-west in October 2011. It is being delivered by An Gaeláras in Derry and will build on the success of the primary languages programme. I am delighted to say that early indications are that the programme has been very well received by the schools and parents involved.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred to schools that “wish to be involved” in his initial answer. Will he elaborate on that given that so many schools would not wish to be involved other than in teaching Irish as one of a multiplicity of other foreign languages?

Mr O’Dowd: The Member has answered his own question. If you wish to be involved, you are involved. If you do not wish to be involved, you are not involved. It is quite simple, in English or any other language. I am sure that he can understand that.

Mr Copeland: Will the Minister detail his Department’s assessment of the return on capital employed given the increased level of expenditure on the promotion of the Irish language in the Irish-medium sector, which appears to have increased from £11.3 million in 2007-08 to £14.9 million in 2011-12?

Mr O’Dowd: I missed the start of the question. Does the Member want me to report on the return of the capital involved? With the Speaker’s permission, perhaps he would clarify that?

Mr Copeland: Given the priorities facing his Department, is that level of capital expenditure justified?

Mr O’Dowd: The resource involvement in Irish-medium education is justified by the parental demand for it and by the fact that, under the Good Friday Agreement, we have a legislative duty to promote and facilitate Irish-medium education. The return is that thousands of young people now speak Irish, their native language, and are involved in the cultural expression and use of that language.

More and more people from across our communities, regardless of their constitutional or any other view of this state, are prepared to accept the use of the Irish language as a non-threatening language with which everyone can and should be involved. There are many different political views, but most are prepared to accept and learn the Irish language. I am proud to say that my Department of Education has been involved in the promotion of the language. We have been investing in it and will continue to do so.

Primary Schools: Computer-based Assessments

3. **Mr Anderson** asked the Minister of Education for an update on the operation of the new computer-based assessment arrangements for primary schools. (AQO 3051/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: Ninety per cent of assessments have now been completed, and the remaining schools are expected to complete their assessments shortly. I understand that, following scheduled overnight updates to the network,

a small number of schools encountered problems in accessing the computer-based literacy assessment on 28 and 29 November. That was due to planned upgrades to the education network and was not an issue specific to the computer-based assessments. Once reported, the technical problems were rectified within a couple of hours. I have been assured that schools can now continue with the assessments and that checks have been put in place to reduce the risk of those incidents happening again.

Mr Anderson: I thank the Minister for his response. I am sure that he will agree that, when computer problems arise during assessment, they can be very stressful for pupils and their teachers. Does he agree that it is vital to ensure that the problems are resolved quickly and effectively and that the IT systems in place are up to the task? When will he agree to a standardised approach to assessment?

Mr O’Dowd: I agree with the Member that there should be no disruption to any assessment in schools, whether computer based or otherwise, and the incidents in the recent autumn term were not acceptable.

Earlier in the autumn, when that issue first arose, I brought all those involved together and emphasised the need for them to set out a programme of work to rectify the problems that schools were facing and to ensure that they never happened again. We have rectified the problem, but I cannot stand in front of the House and definitively say that it will never happen again. Measures are now in place to ensure that a speedy resolution on the computer-based assessment is available to schools. The assessments are there to assist teachers in reporting back to parents on performance. They are not there to replace any of the other assessments that teachers or schools may wish to use to do so.

2.45 pm

I am not sure what the Member means by a single assessment. Schools can use a number of assessments, and, under legislation, computer-based assessment is one of those. I have asked the ETI to carry out a review of the current assessments, and part of that review will include a review of the legislation that stipulates that computer-based assessment has to be part of the tools that teachers use. I believe that computers should, in some format or another, be used in the assessment programme in schools, although I am flexible about what format that takes.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Given the level of investment in the system, can the Minister confirm whether there is potential for any clawback from the service providers in the light of the problems encountered?

Mr O’Dowd: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist, a Chomhalta. Both contracts contain a clawback clause in the event that any part of the service provided by either NILA or NINA does not meet the requirements of the contract. However, we are not at that point. We should await the review of the trialling and implementation process and take into consideration all relevant factors before deciding what, if any, subsequent actions are necessary. The key issues for the moment are to provide support for schools where needed and to ensure that schools can complete the assessments to allow for updating to parents where possible. I am confident that

both tools will provide effective support to teachers to inform parents and pupils on progress achieved and areas for development.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. What plans does the Minister have to make the outcomes of computer-based assessment more relevant to parents and inform teaching in our primary schools? That will probably involve expanding on the answer that he has just given.

Mr O'Dowd: As I said, I have asked the ETI to conduct a review of the current assessment process. As part of that, I also want to see how relevant and up to date the computer-based assessments are. I await the outcome of that report. I am flexible on how computers are used in schools and how they are used as part of the assessment framework. We currently have legislation that quite tightly stipulates the time frame and how assessments should be used. That legislation should be reviewed. We await the outcome of that review, and I will bring a report on that to the Assembly and the Education Committee.

DE: HM Treasury

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister of Education what information his Department provides to HM Treasury annually. (AQO 3052/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is responsible for the flow of departmental information from Departments to Treasury. My Department does not therefore provide information directly to Treasury. I can confirm, however, that my Department provides the necessary information to DFP to allow it to respond to Treasury requests.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his response so far. He will be aware that his Department assists in providing Her Majesty's Treasury with significant and detailed data through the public expenditure statistical analyses. Given that there is a clamour across the House to have greater detail in and greater scrutiny of budget lines, including from some Members from his party who sit on the Finance and Personnel Committee, does it not strike the Minister as odd that he is prepared to assist DFP and provide Her Majesty's Treasury with more detailed information than he is prepared to agree to the House seeing?

Mr O'Dowd: I provide the same amount of detail to the Treasury, through DFP, as all other Executive Departments do. DFP provides a very detailed response to the Treasury. I have no difficulty with transparency in finances, and I have no difficulty with having greater transparency in finances in the Assembly. I do, however, have a difficulty with the Department of Finance and Personnel having the ability to tell me as Minister how, when and where I should spend Department of Education finances. That is not transparency; that is interference.

We are all clearly governed by the relevant legislation as Ministers, and we are all clearly governed by the code of conduct for Ministers. I am not aware that I am in breach of any legislation or the code of conduct, so I am living up to all my responsibilities on this. If the Treasury were to say that it now had my information and that it was going to tell my Department how to spend its money, I would tell it that it would not be getting any more information.

There is a need for —

Mr Storey: It is its money. It gave the money to you.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr O'Dowd: The Treasury gets its money from taxpayers. It does not grow the money on trees.

There is a need for us to resolve the situation. I am on the record, and I will go on it again: I am completely in favour of financial transparency. I am involved in financial transparency, but I will not allow DFP or any other Department to tell me how the Department of Education will run its affairs.

Mr McKay: The Minister answered the question that I was going to ask. Can he detail some examples of the data that he forwards to the Department of Finance and Personnel? Perhaps he can inform us whether he remains on the Finance Minister's Christmas card list.

Mr O'Dowd: I provide to the Department of Finance and Personnel and the Assembly the following information: in-year monitoring rounds — updates submitted in June, September, December and January — reflecting changes in spending plans; the provisional out-turn in May; the final out-turn in August; reporting administrations; the programme of capital spending against budget allocations; monthly out-turn and forecast out-turn information, providing details of all spend to date and projected spend for the rest of the financial year; and annually managed expenditure details. I could go on and on, but I suspect that it will not reach the news headlines. I provide quite a lengthy list of returns to the Department of Finance and Personnel because that allows for financial transparency and does not interfere in my role as Minister running the Department of Education.

I do not know whether I am on the Finance Minister's Christmas card list, and the least said about that, the better.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Minister outline the benefits of that process to education itself?

Mr O'Dowd: That is exactly the point. My officials could spend a lot of time shifting papers from one desk to another but, quite rightly, they want to be involved in delivering services to schools, boards and communities, rather than being paper-shufflers. It is beyond me what benefit it could bring to education for further paperwork on financial issues to be pushed back and forward. If there is a need for further financial transparency, I will support it, but I will not support any measure that interferes in my role as Minister.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Phil Flanagan is not in his place for question 5.

Education and Skills Authority

6. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Education, given that there is no representation for Irish-medium and integrated education on the Education and Skills Authority board, whether he will seek to amend the Education Bill to remedy this situation. (AQO 3054/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to amend the provisions on membership of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) in the Education Bill. Those provisions preserve the established role of the transferors and trustees in membership of the administration arrangements for

education. There will also be four members appointed from the community, and representatives of other sectors may apply for those positions if they wish. ESA will have a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate Irish-medium education. To give effect to that, ESA will need to ensure that it has staff with knowledge and expertise in Irish-medium education and that it engages with the sector and gives due regard to its views.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Seo í mo cheist ar an Aire. Does the Minister agree that, if Irish-medium education and, indeed, integrated education are to be at the heart of the system here — that was not always the case in the past — it is essential that they have proper representation at board level on ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat as an cheist, a Chomhalta. Irish-medium education and integrated education are at the heart of our education system. They are integral parts of education. They are no longer standing outside education being referred to on a needs basis. They are now part of the education system, and the reason for that is that we have a statutory duty, under the law, to ensure that we promote and facilitate Irish-medium education and, indeed, integrated education. That is not going to change with the ESA Bill. That statutory duty will also be placed upon ESA, regardless of its membership. Apart from those set out under the heads of agreement, membership has yet to be finalised in the sense that there are to be four community appointments to the board. So, there is a statutory duty on my Department and there will be a statutory duty on ESA which, I have no doubt, will continue to copper-fasten Irish-medium education and integrated education as a part of our education system.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. However, I am very concerned that he is not looking at amending the membership of ESA, which does not directly include the teaching fraternity. Will he support the Bill being amended, so that we get head teachers or principals into the body of ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: We could end up with an ESA board consisting of several dozen people representing every sector of education, everyone who works in education, everyone who wants to be involved in education and everyone who thinks that they know something about education. Teachers are very important, and teachers' voices will continue to be heard in education.

The role of the ESA board is to be a strategic delivery body for education. It will have a duty to consult all its stakeholders, and teachers are a crucial stakeholder in education. It will have to consult all the unions and everyone out there on its programmes of work and how it delivers education. So, no one's voice is not going to be heard, but it is impractical to have a strategic body with a board that consists of everyone. That just does not work.

One of the reasons why the boards have become outdated is that a 35-person board running a body does not work. It did work for a time and, in fairness to the boards, they brought us through some very difficult times in our collective history, and they continued to deliver education through those times, but we have to bring forward a modern mechanism to deliver our education system. I believe that the board, as currently constituted under the

draft legislation, is the way forward. The board will have a duty to consult everyone.

Mr Agnew: Given that the Minister has just made it clear that the integrated sector and the Irish-medium sector are now part of our education system, why have they not been given a place on the board of ESA?

Mr O'Dowd: I am sure that I will hear the same argument from the voluntary grammar sector and others around why they have not been given a place on the ESA board. I repeat what I said to Mr Bradley. They are an integral part of education. The ESA board is not there as a representative body of everybody in education. The ESA board's responsibility will be to deliver the key services to our education sectors. It will have statutory duties placed on it around Irish-medium and integrated education, it will have other duties placed on it to ensure that it delivers a fair and equitable service to everyone, and it will have a duty to consult the people it serves. Everyone's voice will be involved in ESA. However, it is impractical and would, I think, be a mistake to have every representative body around the ESA table. It is not a negotiating mechanism: it is a delivery body for education.

Mr Deputy Speaker: David McIlveen is not in his place.

Area-based Planning: Consultation

8. **Mr Moutray** asked the Minister of Education when the results of the area-based planning consultation will be published. (AQO 3056/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each of the education and library boards has submitted a report to my Department on the key issues raised in the consultation. They have also outlined how they will address those issues. I will consider those reports, and I intend to make them public in due course.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he use his influence to move things on so that people in my constituency who, like me, support the Dickson plan can have any doubts about its future dispelled?

Mr O'Dowd: I assure the Member that I am using my influence every day in the Department of Education, as is my role. We had 47,000 responses to area planning, which is fantastic. It shows that there has been great community involvement in the response to area planning, and we have to have regard to those responses.

I have given the boards a bit of time to go through the consultation responses and ensure that the voices of those who have spoken are listened to and reported back to me. I had hoped to be in a position to report back to the Assembly in January. However, given the volume of responses, I suspect that it will be February before I report back to the Assembly. At that stage, I will be in a position to report back on the different aspects of our education system.

3.00 pm

Employment and Learning

Mr Deputy Speaker: Mr Jim Wells is not in his place. I call Jim Allister.

Stranmillis University College: Governing Body

2. **Mr Allister** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning why there has been delay in activating the process to appoint a new chairperson to the governing body of Stranmillis University College, Belfast. (AQO 3063/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

The process of appointing a new chairperson to the governing body of Stranmillis University College has been activated and is under way. I understand that the post will be advertised in the press from 13 December.

Mr Allister: The Minister has known for a very long time that the present chairman would be retiring in December and that, therefore, a new chairman would be required. Indeed, three other members of the board have retired. Why, therefore, has there been this delay in activating the process? Can we be assured that, this time, a chairman who believes in Stranmillis, who supports the continuance of Stranmillis and who will work admirably with the staff there will be appointed?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his two supplementary questions. I am not sure which one he wants me to answer, but perhaps I will humour him and answer both. To address the second issue first, the current chair of Stranmillis college has my full confidence; I believe that he has done an excellent job in that role. However, his term of office is coming to an end.

In response to the Member's first point, it is worth stressing that detailed consideration has been given, and is being given, to the merger of Stranmillis college and Queen's University. It has the support of the boards of governors of Stranmillis college and Queen's University; it also has my support and the support of my Department. At present, there is not sufficient support in the House to take forward the necessary legislation to make that a reality. We also have the ongoing review of the teacher education infrastructure, the first phase of which I hope to bring to an end within the next number of weeks.

In light of all those factors, I wanted to give careful consideration to whether it was appropriate to appoint a new chair, given that the long-term role of Stranmillis is under discussion and review. However, I concluded that it was appropriate at this time to run the competition not only for the new chairperson but for three additional governors to the board.

Mrs Overend: Can the Minister confirm that Stranmillis College is converting to non-departmental public body status and whether that also applies to St Mary's? If not, why not?

Dr Farry: I can confirm that Stranmillis and St Mary's have been classified as non-departmental public bodies by the Office for National Statistics. That body is independent not only of our Executive and Assembly but of the UK Government. At present, my officials are working through the implications of that reclassification. It is likely that St Mary's will be reconsidered in that context, because a number of representations have been made in that regard. It is important that everyone remembers that St Mary's and Stranmillis are not mirror images of each other; they were founded on a different basis, and they have different

aspects of governance. It is important that we find a way forward that reflects what is appropriate.

Mr Storey: Will the Minister assure the House that he will do all in his power to address the situation regarding the representation of the transferors at Stranmillis, given that it was a former Member of the House — a former Minister — who removed the transferors from their rightful position on the board of governors, and that Stranmillis educates teachers for the controlled sector? It is vital that that sector be protected?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question, but there are a number of fallacies behind the points that he makes: Stranmillis is a non-denominational institution that seeks to train teachers for the entire education sector in Northern Ireland. Although, historically, it may have been viewed as supplying teachers to one particular sector, that is neither the position in practice nor, indeed, in law. The same applies to St Mary's and to all the teacher providers in Northern Ireland. I certainly subscribe to the view that any professionally trained teacher, irrespective of their personal background, should be capable of teaching in any school in Northern Ireland, even schools that have a particular ethos. It is important that we bear that in mind as we move forward.

Mrs D Kelly: I welcome the Minister's points in relation to the current chairperson of the board of governors. They fought valiantly for Stranmillis over a number of years. Does the Minister share my concern that the viability of Stranmillis should be a stand-alone question and not something that is brought into a sectarian dispute?

Dr Farry: I concur with the first point that the Member made in respect of my confidence in the outgoing chair of the board of governors. However, I reject some of the other points that she made. We should not be having a sectarian dispute in any sense about teacher training, but it is my view that we cannot just look at the future of Stranmillis separately from the wider teacher training system in Northern Ireland. I have been on record and made a statement to the House saying that I do not believe that the current system is sustainable and viable in the medium term. So, we have to ask ourselves some hard and searching questions as to what is the best way forward.

In the light of that, I have set out a two-stage review of the process. The first deals with the financial viability of the colleges, and that is due to report very shortly. After that, I intend to move to the second phase, which is to discuss with all the providers how we can look to various formats for the sharing of teacher training in Northern Ireland. In doing so, while I may have my personal views as to the ideal way forward, I am prepared to listen to the views of the sector and to see where we can find consensus among providers on the best way forward. This should not be seen as a process that is threatening to anybody, but it is something that I hope everyone will embrace as a means of ensuring that we provide a professional means of training teachers in Northern Ireland that is financially sustainable.

University of Ulster: Belfast Campus

3. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the benefits of the planned University of Ulster Belfast campus development plan. (AQO 3064/11-15)

Dr Farry: The University of Ulster's planned move to a new landmark building on its York Street campus will provide it with accommodation that is fit for a modern university. It will improve its utilisation of space and provide it with high-quality teaching and research facilities. The university demonstrated in an economic appraisal that the newbuild in Belfast was better value for money than redeveloping its existing facilities at Jordanstown. The total investment will amount to £250 million and represents one of the largest infrastructure investments in Belfast in recent years. It will provide a welcome boost to Northern Ireland's construction industry and will make a major contribution to the economic and social regeneration of that part of the city.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he outline whether he has had any discussions with his counterparts regarding possible difficulties with student accommodation in the area?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question and for his supplementary question. There are probably two spillover issues that need to be considered as we move forward, and they are issues not only for my Department but for others. Those two issues are, first of all, as the Member has outlined, accommodation, and, secondly, sufficient transport infrastructure in respect of private car use with respect to car parking, roads infrastructure and public transport. Belfast City Council is also involved in discussions, given that it has a critical role in the future of Belfast city. I believe that this is an exciting project, but, given the scale of it, we want to make sure that we get it right. As we move into the planning phase of the development, those issues will come more to the forefront.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We got a presentation on that issue. It is very exciting and will hugely impact on that part of the city.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Can we have a question, please?

Mr F McCann: I was just coming to it. Given the amount of businesses that are lying derelict in the area, is there any possibility that the Minister could bring the universities and the businesspeople together to see what impact they can have in providing accommodation for students, as we will see an influx of thousands of additional students into the area?

Dr Farry: Accommodation is not my direct responsibility as Minister for Employment and Learning, but I recognise my responsibility in relation to universities and higher education. I am happy to play whatever role I can in facilitating any dialogue that is required to take place. Any way you look at it, an investment on this scale will have a major regeneration boost for that part of the city and further afield. There will be benefits for existing businesses, both those that are derelict and want to be sparked back into life and those that wish to grow.

It is also crucial to remember the importance of developing Belfast as a university city. Around the world, universities play a critical role as key drivers in boosting economic activity. They provide the skills base for an economy through investment in research and development, but the sheer spending power of students, academics and other university employees can also make a real impact on a city's economic life, whether that be through social aspects or taxis, shops and other businesses.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht na

bhfreagraí go nuige. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Speaking as chair of the all-party working group on construction, I believe that it would be a welcome shot in the arm and a boost for that sector. Will the Minister outline the time frame and investment that are associated with the project?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. He is certainly right to highlight the importance of a project of that scale for the construction sector. I hope that we will have some additional capital plans for the further education sector that will also boost the construction sector. That plan will, hopefully, be completed by 2018, so it will be a medium-term investment. We hope to take the next steps in the near future. A project planning application was submitted to the Planning Service in March 2012, and it is hoped that it will make a decision in early 2013. As part of that, there will be issues that the Member's colleague the Minister of the Environment will wish to consider.

Further and Higher Education: Language Courses

4. **Mr Hamilton** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department is taking to increase the uptake of languages at further education colleges and higher education institutes. (AQO 3065/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am aware of the importance to businesses in Northern Ireland of individuals with language skills at graduate and other levels. Language skills will play an important role in assisting businesses to promote their products and develop trade links in foreign markets.

My Department sets the strategic direction for the further and higher education sectors. However, each institution is responsible for its own curriculum offering, which includes the teaching of languages. Provision is dictated largely by demand for those courses.

Further education colleges currently offer an extensive range of language courses, from non-accredited beginner courses up to and including level 3 certificates. Language provision can be embedded in a number of specific curriculum areas, such as business, marketing, hospitality and tourism, although that will be of particular assistance to those who have previously studied languages at school. Those courses are marketed proactively to learners and employers through websites and prospectuses, and by a variety of social mediums.

In 2011-12, which is the most recent year for which validated data is available, there were 2,556 enrolments on language courses in the further education sector. They included European and Middle Eastern languages, such as Irish, French, German, Italian, modern Greek, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese. In the same year, there were 485 enrolments onto language courses at Northern Ireland's higher education institutions.

The two universities offer an extensive range of degree and extra-curricular courses in a wide range of languages. The University of Ulster offers degree courses in French, German, Spanish and Chinese. Queen's University Belfast offers degree courses in French, Irish, Spanish and Portuguese. In addition, Queen's University's language centre offers extra-curricular courses in 22 different languages.

Mr Hamilton: I thank the Minister for his reply. I am sure that he is aware of the British Council's criticism of Northern Ireland's underperformance with regard to foreign languages. Given the objectives that the Minister and I share on growing the economy, does he agree that the sector has a greater role to play in encouraging people not only to continue languages but to increase their understanding of a broader range of foreign languages?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his main and supplementary questions. I certainly concur with the sentiments that he expressed. Perhaps I will put it in the following terms, of which the Member will be well aware.

3.15 pm

We have our economic strategy, which underpins all that the Executive and individual Departments seek to do on the economy. Its central theme is the need to increase exports from Northern Ireland businesses. We need export-led growth if we are to have a real step change in our economy because our local market is not big enough to sustain the level of growth that we want. Obviously, given that we want to expand our exports and trade, we need an uplift in people's knowledge of and skills in languages.

Mr B McCrea: With the emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, many teachers in different institutions feel that languages are being left behind. Has the Minister given any consideration to producing a language strategy that would unify the approach taken by various institutions and convince parents and pupils alike that languages are, indeed, an important part of our economy?

Dr Farry: I thank the Committee Chair for his question. Our promotion of STEM subjects is not to the exclusion of other types of study. For sure, we need to significantly increase knowledge of STEM subjects because people will require those very specific skills if we are to grow our economy, and we have plenty of research to back that up. However, we need people who are adept and flexible. Indeed, those who study STEM subjects will benefit from having some knowledge of a language so that they are able to operate in a range of sectors.

The Member also mentioned the potential for a language strategy, which I would endorse. He may be interested to know that the Minister of Education has lead responsibility for the development of languages for study. I have no doubt that he can ask the Minister directly for an update, or the Committee may wish to pursue that and get a progress report on where the strategy stands.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Will the Minister explain why his Department has effectively withdrawn funding for the provision of Irish-medium further education, despite there being a real demand for that and a legislative requirement on the Department to provide same?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I am not entirely sure whether I agree with him about the nature of a particular legislative requirement. I stress that I am more than happy for our further education sector to offer Irish.

The Member may be referring to issues with particular courses, and I am happy to have a conversation with him

about that. I know that I had correspondence from some of his colleagues about particular issues.

The central point is that I am delighted that the Líofa project has been taken up by the further education (FE) sector. The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure asked whether we could publicise that through the FE sector, and I was happy to oblige. Ultimately, the provision of courses in the FE sector is largely driven by demand, and where demand exists, provision will be made. I am happy for that to continue to be the case.

NEET Strategy

5. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he intends to ensure that the not in education, employment or training strategy reaches those persons most in need. (AQO 3066/11-15)

Dr Farry: Pathways to Success, the Executive's strategy for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) was developed to ensure a cross-departmental, cross-agency approach to help young people who face barriers to participation, and it is complemented by initiatives to tackle the wider problem of youth unemployment.

The strategy seeks to join up effectively actions being taken across the Executive to prevent young people from falling into the NEET category in the first place, with measures to re-engage those who have left school but are not in any other form of education, training or employment. It also sets out a number of key supporting measures to ensure that we can identify our young people's needs and match young people with opportunities to meet those needs. The strategy introduces a number of new initiatives in the context of wider existing and developing programmes of intervention. In combination, these represent a comprehensive programme of action, for which the Executive as a whole will provide leadership.

The initiatives on which my Department is leading are specifically targeted at young people most in need and their families. These initiatives include a community family support programme; a community-based access programme; a collaboration and innovation fund; and a training allowance for young people taking part in programmes supported by the European social fund.

My Department helped to establish a forum of community and voluntary organisations that are active in that field, which proved extremely beneficial in informing the development of the strategy. To ensure that the voluntary and community sector voice continues to be heard, the NEET strategy forum has been formally recognised as part of the organisational arrangements for taking forward the strategy.

My Department will lead a NEET advisory group and facilitate a partnership approach and joint working with Departments, the voluntary and community sector, the education sector, the health and social care sector, local government and the business sector.

Mr Boylan: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. How does the strategy help those with disability to return to employment or education?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. A key theme threaded through the NEET strategy is a much

more individually tailored approach to the circumstances facing young people who are disengaged. Disability issues, whether physical or mental health issues, are real barriers for people, so we are putting a lot of emphasis on individual mentoring.

We are also stressing that, beyond the precise limits of the NEET strategy, within employment services we have the disability employment service (DES), which is dedicated to working with people with specific disability needs to support them to look for employment and when they are in employment. Moreover, Training for Success, which is the main statutory programme provided for young people post-16, is extended in eligibility for those people with a disability.

Mr Copeland: I, too, thank the Minister for his responses. Will he outline how, if at all, the £3.8 million collaboration and innovation fund could or will be used to help those not in employment, education or training, or, at the very least, what proposals he has received?

Dr Farry: I certainly can, but, with respect, I cannot announce those just yet to the Member and the House. The closing date for applications to the fund was the middle of November. My officials have reviewed and judged those programmes. The response to the initiative was very strong, and I am extremely encouraged by the level and quality of responses that we received.

I am hoping to finalise decisions on awards of funding over the coming days and to consider whether we can add additional resources to the pot to ensure that we can fund more of the good projects that came forward than were originally planned. I would like to be in a position within the next couple of weeks to make a formal announcement about the projects that will be supported.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his reply. Indeed, I commend him for his endeavours to reach out to one of the most socially disadvantaged groups of young people in present circumstances. Does he agree that more needs to be done, and how much has been spent on the strategy to date?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his supplementary question and agree with its thrust. I am pleased at what we managed to achieve over the past 12 months. When I assumed office, there was no budget available and set aside for NEETs. We were committed to producing a strategy, but it was envisaged at that stage to be no more than a means to draw together existing programmes and spending from Departments.

I am pleased that the strategy that we produced includes new interventions. As part of the wider youth employment business case and funding that we secured from the Executive this year, we have approximately £10 million set aside specifically for NEETs over the remaining three financial years of the current Budget period. That represents a significant intervention and shows the Executive's commitment to address that issue. I sure that the Member will concur that this is a major problem and will require a sustained intervention in not just this Assembly mandate but into the future.

There is a lot of work that we have to do to properly engage young people. Indeed, the images that we have seen over the past number of days and weeks, and our recent past in Northern Ireland, show that we really

have an agenda of ensuring that our young people understand that they have a real stake in this society. We need to provide the means to ensure that they have the opportunities to realise that stake.

Steps 2 Success

6. **Mr Lynch** asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Steps 2 Success programme, given the serious concerns raised in other jurisdictions regarding employment schemes and their failure to deliver permanent jobs. (AQO 3067/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department is working on the development of Steps 2 Success, which will replace Steps to Work in 2014. Steps to Work is delivering a quality intervention that helps people in Northern Ireland to move into work. However, given that the programme has now been running for over four years, I would have been asking for a thorough review in any event. That would have been carried out regardless of the forthcoming introduction of universal credit or the ending of Steps to Works contracts.

Steps 2 Success is being developed to ensure that we continue to offer unemployed people the best opportunity to find a job. The Steps 2 Success public consultation exercise delivered over 80 responses from a range of organisations. Those responses are being evaluated, and they will help to inform the final shape of the new programme. I assure the Member that every attempt will be made to ensure that we develop and deliver the best programme for Northern Ireland.

It would be unwise not to consider what is happening with other employment schemes in Great Britain and further afield. The lessons that we can learn will prove invaluable in helping to avoid the pitfalls that have occurred elsewhere. The new programme presents a real opportunity to meet the employment needs of those who require it most.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. I thank the Minister for his answer. I ask him to detail the financial incentives that are given to people to encourage them to take part in the Steps 2 Success programme. I am specifically referring to travel and other expenses that the individual might incur.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. I am happy to write to him to set out specifically the assistance that is on offer today through Steps to Work for individuals who are in those circumstances. It is worth stressing that, as we move to a new programme and the contracting for it, one of the things that we will be looking to do is provide more flexibility around how the system works; we will provide flexibility to the contractors and subcontractors around how they can assist people to get into work.

There is a concept called the black box, which has been applied in the programme in Great Britain. It is, basically, a laissez-faire approach. Clients are handed over to the contractors, who are then asked to use their best endeavours to find them work without much accountability or understanding of what happens or who they prioritise to get work. That is not appropriate for Northern Ireland. I am not committed to the approach that has been applied in Great Britain. I intend to use a much more service-level-agreement-driven process, which could perhaps be called

a grey-box approach. We have to find an appropriate balance of giving flexibility to contractors while ensuring that we preserve accountability by ensuring that all clients are treated equally and that assistance is given to everybody to find work.

Mr Kinahan: Have many people raised concerns about moving the timing of payment in Steps 2 Success? Does he feel that many people may not apply because of that?

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for his question. The Steps 2 Success consultation was an extremely worthwhile exercise. Although, at times, there can be a lot of cynicism about consultations, such as the view that they are, essentially, a tick-box exercise for Departments and a hoop that we have to jump through, that was certainly not the case with Steps 2 Success. Indeed, it is not ever the case with anything that we do. We have had a lot of very useful feedback from the 80-plus responses that we have received.

The issue of the funding model is very much in my mind at present. We are giving consideration to having a different funding model than was originally set out in the consultation document. In doing that we are very mindful of the experience seen in Great Britain to date, both in the sustainability of the contractors who take on the contracts and their current success rate for placements.

3.30 pm

Mr Wells: On a point of order.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry; that ends questions to the Minister for Employment and Learning. There is a point of order.

Mr Wells: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I apologise to you and Minister Farry for my failure to appear for question No 1. I have only three defences. First, it is a first offence. Secondly, I was 30 seconds late. Thirdly, I was across the Atlantic with the Health Committee last week, so, although my body is at Stormont, my head is somewhere across that ocean. However, I realise the inconvenience that my absence caused you and the Minister, and I give you an assurance that it will not happen again.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I thank the Member for making his apology. I remind all Members that, although we know the precise time that the first Question Time will start, no one knows when precisely Question Time for the second Minister will start. Perhaps we will all learn from that.

Adjourned at 3.31 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 December 2012

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Matter of the Day

Attempted Murder of a Police Officer in East Belfast

Mr Speaker: Mr David Ford has been given leave to make a statement on the attempted murder of a police officer in east Belfast, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. If other Members wish to be called, they should rise in their place and continue to do so. All Members called will have up to three minutes to speak on the subject.

Mr Ford: As you said, Mr Speaker, last evening at approximately 7.00 pm, there was an attempt to murder a female police officer sitting in a police car on the Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, adjacent to the office occupied by my colleagues Naomi Long MP, Chris Lyttle MLA and Judith Cochrane MLA. I am not sure what those who carried out the attack intended when they arrived at the site, armed with at least one petrol bomb and cudgels. Whether it was intended to be an attack on my colleagues' office or an attack on the Police Service, what is absolutely clear is that it became an attack with murderous intent on a female officer. That has taken us into an even worse position than we believed we were in last week.

We are no longer talking about how many days the Union flag is flown on Belfast City Hall. We are now talking about the contest between democracy and the rule of law on the one hand and terrorism and fascism on the other hand. There can be no ifs, no buts and no qualifications in that debate. There must be an utterly united voice against that. I say to certain Members that if they condemn violence, they must say that they condemn violence without the "but such and such" statements. There can be no debate about the issue at all.

I am proud to be Minister of Justice in this place. I am proud of my party colleagues. I am proud of the women and men of the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I am proud of the courage, resilience and strength that both groups have shown in recent days. But it not just a matter for me as Minister of Justice, it is a matter for each of us in this House — for all Ministers and Members — to show absolute and unequivocal support for the rule of law and for democratic means only.

Last week, and indeed as it has for a period of weeks I believe, unionism metaphorically marched many of its supporters up the hill. There is a suggestion that, today, some of them will be physically marched up the hill.

Mr Bell: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. This is meant to be a debate about an attack on a police officer, not a party political statement.

Mr Speaker: Order. We are in a very volatile situation outside.

A Member: And he is making it worse.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask all Members to be careful of the language that they use in this House so that they do not further fuel a very serious situation out there. I will allow the Member to finish. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr Ford: Thank you, Mr Speaker. If Members have difficulty in accepting the context in which this violence occurred, we have real problems in this Building.

Mr Bell: You walked out of CSI.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, I remind Members of their language in this House.

Mr Ford: On Radio Ulster this morning, the Chief Constable said that this was a time for measured reflection. That means that it is a time for each of us to accept the responsibilities that we bear in this place.

I wish to conclude by saying to you, Mr Speaker, with due respect to you and your office, that the question as to whether the Assembly Commission should sit in the charged atmosphere of today is one that is very serious.

Mr Givan: I make this statement on behalf of the Democratic Unionist Party. From the outset, I make it clear that nobody should use an attack on a police officer to score political points, and I will not do that.

I want to make it clear that the attempted murder of the police officer yesterday evening was a despicable attack on the rule of law. It is something that the whole House should rightly unite on and condemn utterly. Yesterday, this party condemned — without reservation, without qualification, without vagueness — any violence associated with the decision of Belfast City Council. It is wrong and should stop.

Let me make it clear that those who carried out this attack are not loyalists. They are criminals and they should be treated as such. We will support the police in applying the full force of the law to bring those individuals to justice.

It is vital that those who continue to have protests do not go out on to the streets if they cannot guarantee that there will be no violence, no blocking of roads or disruption to people's lives. If that is the case, they should desist from that activity. Therefore, we support the Police Service and

the rule of law, and we condemn utterly the despicable attack that took place yesterday.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. It is a day on which we need to at least try to speak with one voice. On behalf of Sinn Féin, I condemn the attempted murder of the policewoman along with the other attacks on a number of councillors and MLAs. Indeed, on the same night there was an attack on Cathy Rafferty, a Sinn Féin councillor, in her place of business in Armagh. I condemn all the attacks that have taken place throughout the week.

I welcome this morning's statement by the leader of the UUP, in which he pointed out that since it seems that these protests cannot happen in a peaceful way it was time to bring them to a conclusion. I hope that I have not misquoted him in that.

I have just listened to Paul Givan, who, I think, was saying the same thing about the protests. I agree with the First Minister that there has to be a right to peaceful protest, but we have gone beyond that this week.

I would argue for calm over Christmas and for people to pull back and allow for conversations, not just about flags but about the whole issue of equality and a shared future.

Mr Hussey: I will begin by declaring an interest as a member of the Policing Board and as a former part-time officer in both the PSNI and the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

My opening remarks will relate specifically to the attempted murder of a police officer. Nobody in this House can accept this in any way, shape or form. Who would bring a petrol bomb to a peaceful protest? I have spoken many times about the use of petrol bombs. They are not something that you just pick up on a side street. The people who did this went with murderous intent. They are not loyalists, because, to be a loyalist, you are loyal to the Crown. These people are not loyal to the Crown. They are not loyal to the flag. They are not loyal to the Union flag. They are nothing other than terrorists. That is what they are, and I condemn them for that. I condemn them unreservedly for that.

In the past few days, we have had threats against Members of this House, councillors and Members of Parliament. That is wrong. It is terrorism, and I condemn terrorism unreservedly. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is doing a wonderful job in the circumstances that it has to face. We are approaching Christmas, and we are supposed to be a Christian country. I ask anyone who is involving themselves in these acts of violence to look to their own hearts and to stop them immediately.

Mr McDevitt: I rise on behalf of the SDLP and also as a member of the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

Between 5.00 pm and 7.00 pm last night, there were 43 separate illegal roadblocks across our city. Four of those involved violence: violence against innocent motorists and working people trying to get home, to collect their children and to feed their families. They also involved violence against the police. Shortly before 8.00 pm last night, the back window of an unmarked police car was broken and a petrol bomb thrown through it while a serving female officer was in the vehicle. It was an act of murderous intent.

That act, like the roadblocks and like the violence, is the consequence of a failure of the politics of this House — a failure of the politics of this House and of this city. It is

about time that people faced up to their failures. If they do not, and if they fail to step back from the brink that they are talking themselves onto, they will be coming here to condemn other terrible acts. This must be brought to an end. It is not enough to come in here in the morning and condemn and then go on the airwaves and continue to profile and single out colleagues and fellow elected representatives as the problem when, in fact, they are not. They are the architects of the new Northern Ireland. They are the people who go to work to serve all of us.

I keep saying that this House has a wonderful opportunity to build a new Northern Ireland and a shared society. Today, we are reminded how shared our society is. The census results tell us that this place belongs to nobody but its people, that its people are diverse, and that the PSNI is now representative of all of those people in a way that it never was. It serves them all. This has to end. It is time for political unionism to join the rest of us in demanding that we move beyond the politics of flags and the zero-sum equation of identity —

Mr Speaker: Order. As all sides of the House know, I allow some latitude in and around these issues. However, I really have to say this to Members: be careful of the language that is used in the House this morning.

Mr McDevitt: I appreciate your guidance, Mr Speaker. I will conclude on this point. There is an attempt to bring the issue of flags to the House on this day. I ask you, sir, as our Speaker, and all of us, as representatives of this House, this simple question: is this the time to bring that matter to this House? Is that the message that you want to send out from this place?

Mr Speaker: Mr Allister — *[Interruption.]*

Mrs D Kelly: William Moffett voted for it.

Mr Bell: Raymond McCreech.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr A Maginness: Danny Kennedy did.

Mr Speaker: Order.

10.45 am

Mr Allister: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I will take points of order after we have dealt with this particular issue.

Mr Allister: Last night's attack on the police vehicle was a wicked act of terrorism. There is no other way in which it can or should be described, nor are there any circumstances in which it can be excused or justified. I make that comment, in common with most people in this House, as someone who has never been a practitioner or a supporter of terrorism. Therefore, those of us in that category can make this condemnation with integrity and sincerity.

I regret that, this morning, the Alliance Party has sought to attack unionism and to politick over the Assembly Commission business. Nor do I feel inclined to take any lectures from those who lend their votes to glorify terrorism by naming parks after dead terrorists.

Mr Agnew: The Green Party condemns outright the attack on the PSNI officer yesterday evening on the Upper Newtownards Road. I put on record the Green Party's thanks to the PSNI for the work that it is doing to protect democratically elected representatives and our communities in the midst of continuing violence.

I appeal to those who have protested to date, peacefully or otherwise. Your point has been made. For better or worse, we are discussing flags in this Chamber. There is nothing to be gained from further protests. I said yesterday that I had attended many protests, particularly as a supporter of trade unions, but — I apologise for having to say this to those peaceful protestors who feel that they still have a point to make — it is clear that these protests cannot continue peacefully. For that reason, they should not continue at all.

I further appeal to Members, particularly Government Ministers and party leaders, to be careful about their language, particularly on radio shows. That particularly applies to Ministers, who, ultimately, represent all the people of Northern Ireland. We should all be condemning this. Those are the only words that are needed. Sometimes, there is wisdom in saying less and doing more behind the scenes quietly to resolve these issues. There is a lot I could say about things that are said and done in this Chamber, but today is not the day for that. Today is the day to condemn the violence, to offer our support to the PSNI and to work quietly behind the scenes to bring the violence to an end.

Mr McClarty: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to add my voice of condemnation. As you have pointed out, Mr Speaker, what happens and what is said in this House may cause a reaction on the street. Like you, I ask for temperate language at all times in the House.

Like all right-thinking people, I am absolutely disgusted by the violence that has ensued. Last night's attempted murder of a female police officer who was merely carrying out her duty is to be condemned without reservation by all right-thinking people. The media refers to the individuals responsible as "loyalists". Like Mr Hussey, I have to ask this: loyal to what? Loyal to the Crown? Those people tried to murder a member of Her Majesty's police service, and they call themselves "loyalists"? I think we are going to have to change the definition of the word "loyalist".

I appeal to everybody to stop this vicious cycle of violence right away to allow those who are trying to resolve the issue by dialogue the time and space to do so. I appeal to those who are presently carrying out the violence to desist immediately, because their actions merely sully the flag that they claim to defend.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. That concludes this piece of business.

Mr Lyttle: On a point of order —

Mr Speaker: First of all, I will take the point of order from Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: Could I ask you to review the coverage of the debate, particularly the exchange after the contribution from the Member for South Belfast Mr McDevitt? There was an exchange, from a largely sedentary position, between junior Minister Bell and members of the SDLP on the issue of the naming of McCreesh park by Newry and Mourne District Council, and, from a sedentary position,

Mr Alban Maginness from the SDLP attempted to name me as having been in support of that decision. Clearly, the SDLP is now belatedly attempting to distance itself from that disgraceful and dreadful decision. That, of course, is a matter to be welcomed, but it is not right and it is not fair, and I ask you to investigate comments or suggestions that Mr Maginness has made involving me in the flawed decision of Newry and Mourne District Council.

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask the Member to take his seat. It is a fairly lengthy point of order. Let me say this to the whole House: matters of the day should not be used to score points against other political parties, and, unfortunately, this morning, some Members have attempted to do that. *[Interruption.]* Order. I say to the Member: I will review Hansard and come back to the Member directly.

Mr Lyttle: Mr Speaker, I ask you to review the decision not to permit me, as a Member of this House whose constituency office is in such close proximity to the attempted murder that happened last night, the opportunity to speak this morning and, perhaps, grant me that opportunity now.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member will know that that is at the Chair's discretion and that I have widened out matters of the day. Under the old system for matters of the day, not everybody who has spoken this morning would have got in at all. Not all parties would have got in. However, when I was asked by political parties in this House to look at matters of the day, I did that, and I think that all parties will agree that, in matters of the day, all parties now at least have an opportunity to speak and make a contribution.

Mr Campbell: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, can you confirm that any individual Member is free to apply for a matter of the day?

Mr Speaker: Yes. Matters of the day is very important, but it should not be abused by Members of this House. It certainly should not be used as another attack on another political party in the House.

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker, I accept your ruling to my colleague Mr Lyttle. I do not want to make any other point other than simply to report the fact to the Assembly that there was another attack — a petrol bomb attack — on my constituency office in Bangor last night. Again, I am extremely grateful to the Police Service of Northern Ireland for intervening and stopping the attack from getting any worse. Given that that was an office of the Northern Ireland Assembly, it is important that I put that on record.

Mr Speaker: Order. I remind Mr Lyttle and other Members that other Members of political parties wanted in this morning on the matter of the day. It was not only Mr Lyttle.

Mr Lyttle: *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is coming very close to challenging the authority of the Chair.

Mr P Robinson: On a point of order, is it not the case that, when we have a matter of the day, each party that knows that it will speak will choose the most relevant people to speak? That is why we asked the Chairman of the Justice Committee to speak. Equally, the Alliance Party could have had the Member whose office is close by speak.

Mr A Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Would it be of assistance to the House if I or some other Member

from the SDLP were to lodge a minute of Newry and Mourne District Council in relation to the matter that Mr Kennedy raised so that the House can judge for itself who partook in that decision? *[Interruption.]*

Mr Humphrey: Let your leader condemn it.

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr Humphrey: Let your leader condemn it.

Mr Kennedy: Covered yourselves in glory. Absolutely ridiculous.

Mr Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us move on.

Mr Humphrey: Disgraceful.

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr Maginness has raised a point of order. Whatever issues the Member wants to put into the Library of this House, he can do so. That is not an issue. We are coming to the point where these are not points of order. Members are getting up using the disguise of points of order and are trying to make political statements. Let us move on.

Mr Humphrey: A gross embarrassment.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us move on.

Ministerial Statements

Justice: Intergovernmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters

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

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Thank you, Mr Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I ask Members to leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion.

Mr Ford: With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement (IGA) on co-operation on criminal justice matters held in Dublin on Friday 23 November.

Mr Kennedy: You are flogging very dead horses.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kennedy: You are flogging dead horses.

Mr Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr Kennedy: You ought to be ashamed of yourself.

Mr Speaker: Order. Order. This House is in session. The Minister of Justice is making a statement. *[Interruption.]* Order. Order.

Mr Ford: With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement regarding a meeting under the auspices of the intergovernmental agreement on co-operation on criminal justice matters held in Dublin on Friday 23 November. The meeting was hosted by Alan Shatter TD, Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, and I represented the Executive.

This was the sixth formal ministerial meeting under the IGA since the devolution of justice two and a half years ago. As I said in previous statements to the House, I am committed to keeping the Assembly informed of meetings held under the auspices of the agreement on the same basis as North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) meetings.

The meeting on 23 November, among other things, provided us both with an opportunity to review progress against the 2012-13 joint work programme that we agreed at our meeting in May. It was pleasing to note the positive progress that has been made and the objectives that have either been met or are on target to be met. I previously shared a copy of the 2012-13 work programme with Members as part of the oral statement in June. One of the actions within the work programme is the organisation of a third annual joint public protection seminar. That seminar was held in Dublin on the same day as our meeting.

The theme of the seminar was "Partnership Working for Public Protection", and it provided an opportunity for representatives of both probation services, alongside other agencies, to discuss a number of key public protection issues. These included a co-ordinated strategic response to dealing with crime; communication and joint working; and reducing offending in partnership. The seminar also saw the launch of volume 9 of the 'Irish Probation Journal', an extremely professional joint publication from the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (PBNI) and the Irish Probation Service.

Having addressed the previous two annual seminars, I was particularly pleased to join Alan Shatter in opening the third annual seminar. We have reached the midpoint of the timeline for the work programme, which is due to be completed by next summer. I intend to give a more detailed report on progress made against the actions in the work programme following the next intergovernmental agreement meeting. In the interim, progress against the remaining actions will continue to be monitored by the working group of officials.

Six project advisory groups provide the mechanism by which work is taken forward. They focus on public protection, registered offenders, youth justice, forensic science, support for victims of crime, and social diversity. Each of the project advisory groups has continued to promote and support co-operation across the broad spectrum of criminal justice agencies on both sides of the border. The public protection group, for example, has been involved in joint training and the implementation and delivery on the RESOLVE anger management programme.

Work is ongoing on evaluation research on the stable and acute 2007 tool, which is used for assessing the risk posed by certain offenders in both jurisdictions. The registered offenders group has progressed work in relation to information sharing pertaining to children at risk and domestic violence, while personnel exchanges between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána continue.

The victims group will focus on the victims EU directive at its next meeting in the new year.

The Irish forensic science service is assisting Forensic Science Northern Ireland with drugs analysis in a number of cases, partly to test mechanisms for the transfer of samples. The criminal justice and social diversity group proposes to hold a joint hate crime conference in 2013. The youth justice group is considering protocols between youth facilities and on cross-border supervision of young people. There is excellent ongoing co-operation on the management of sex offenders between the PSNI and an Garda Síochána at an operational level.

I am pleased to report that there continues to be good progress in supporting and promoting North/South co-operation to make Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland a safer place. The meeting was a good opportunity to be updated on the proposal to establish an ad hoc crime strategy group that would report to the working group of officials. Plans have been advanced to establish the group early in 2013.

The intergovernmental agreement provides a helpful framework for supporting North/South co-operation on criminal justice matters. They include the work being done in the areas of tackling organised crime and human trafficking. We are seeing the real benefits of co-operation as individuals in the criminal justice agencies have developed good working relationships with their respective counterparts. It is that type of practical co-operation that Alan Shatter and I are committed to promoting and supporting.

Finally, as I have said, the agreement is not intended to provide for discussion of cross-border security issues. However, I have cause to discuss such matters regularly with Mr Shatter, and I used the opportunity of our being together to briefly discuss some general wider cross-border security-related issues.

11.00 am

Mr Givan (The Chairperson of the Committee for Justice): I thank the Minister for his statement. I note that the next meeting of the victims group will focus on the victims EU directive. Will the Minister provide more details of the specific issues that that group will discuss? If there are proposals for improvements, will they be included in the victims strategy that the Department is consulting on? As to the ongoing investigation into the murder of Prison Officer David Black, will the Minister advise the House whether there was any discussion about how the Garda Síochána is assisting the PSNI in trying to bring those who carried out that murder to justice?

Mr Ford: I thank the Chair for his comments. I will deal with his second point first. On more than one occasion, I was assured by the Chief Constable that there was full co-operation from the Garda Síochána in all the assistance that was required in the investigation of the murder of David Black. It was not an issue that was discussed at ministerial level, but I have the assurance of the Chief Constable that there is co-operation at practical and operational levels.

The Chair rightly highlights the issue of the EU directive on the minimum standards of the rights, support and protection of victims. That will be the principal topic of the next meeting of the victims group. We have taken to the meeting the work that is being done on the implementation of the code of practice for victims of crime in Northern Ireland, and officials from DJE have brought their work on the Republic's charter for victims. It is a matter of seeing where work is being done in one jurisdiction that can assist officials in the other. That joining-up is beneficial to people on both sides of the border.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin. I thank the Minister for his statement. In relation to the management of sex offenders, he said that there was excellent ongoing co-operation between the PSNI and the Garda Síochána. Will he give more detail of what that entails?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Lynch for that point. It is clearly the case that, with the management of sex offenders moving between one jurisdiction and another, there is a particular issue for this region compared with other parts of the United Kingdom. We are looking at how the requirement for sex offenders to notify their details to the police operates, at movement across the border and at the requirements in which notification is given to the other jurisdiction. Work has been led by the PSNI and the Garda Síochána to see that that information sharing is carried through successfully in a way that ensures the protection of people in both jurisdictions.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for his statement. My question follows on from the previous question about sex offenders and co-operation between the PSNI and the gardaí. At what level does that co-operation take place and how up to date is information sharing between the police and the gardaí?

Mr Ford: There appears to be a slight hint in what Mr Elliott said. I have no reason to believe that the information sharing and how the two police services manage it are not up to date. We are looking at the exact timescales for when notifications should occur. We have to acknowledge that there are those who cross the border daily, and, therefore,

this is somewhat different from what would happen elsewhere. If Mr Elliott is hinting at a particular issue that is causing him concern, I will happily take it up.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his statement. I commend the progress made on cross-border co-operation on policing and justice matters. Given the rather limited aims currently, will the Minister consider, with his Southern counterpart, expanding the agenda on justice matters so that we can make incremental progress on these matters?

Mr Ford: I appreciate Mr Maginness's point about the need to ensure that we get the maximum possible co-operation. I am not sure that my officials, who do a fair bit of work, would necessarily agree that the current work is limited. All six project advisory groups are working quite hard to ensure that we learn lessons from each other. However, I am certainly happy to look at any issues that any Member of the House — Mr Maginness or others — wishes to suggest should come within the remit of the IGA. We have to be careful that we do not step into the area of operational issues, whether for the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Garda Síochána or the two probation services. However, if Members believe that there would be benefit in taking forward specific policy issues to better protect the people of Ireland, North and South, I am certainly happy to look at them, although my officials may not be quite so enthusiastic about the work.

Mr Dickson: Thank you, Minister, for your statement. You told us about good co-operation on victims' issues. You will be aware that the Justice Committee did excellent work with regard to victims and witnesses of crime. Will you assure us that you will share that work with your Southern counterparts so that best practice on both sides of the border can become the norm for victims and witnesses?

Mr Ford: I fear, Mr Speaker, that my colleague may have caught me out ever so slightly. I am not specifically sure whether the Justice Committee's report has been shared on a North/South basis, but I assure the House — the Chairman is grinning at me — that, if that is not already the case, it will be shared very rapidly.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for his statement. I welcome progress on cross-border policing and justice. Sadly, that was not always the case. The Minister mentioned the victims' group. Will he confirm to the House when the victims' strategy that he is working on will be finalised?

Mr Ford: I am afraid that I cannot give Mr Humphrey the timing at this stage. However, I can assure him that a lot of detailed work is being done in the Department. That follows on from the very good work done by the Committee, which itself built on work previously done in the Department. The strategy will be finished as quickly as possible to ensure that it is robust and meets the needs of victims and witnesses throughout Northern Ireland at the different levels at which the justice system engages with victims.

Mr Wells: As the Minister is aware, Lord Morrow — quite rightly, in my opinion — is bringing forward a private Member's Bill on human trafficking. As you know, he is proposing weaker legislation through a Bill. During his discussions with his Irish counterpart, was there any discussion of human trafficking? If, as we hope, we, quite rightly, strengthen the legislation on human trafficking and

make Northern Ireland one of the most difficult places in Europe to carry out that vile trade, that may be negated somewhat if the Irish Republic has a more laissez-faire approach. What are the authorities in the Republic doing to deal with this horrible, nasty activity?

Mr Ford: I have to disagree slightly with Mr Wells. I do not accept that what is being proposed by the Department of Justice is necessarily weaker than what is proposed in Lord Morrow's draft Bill. It is certainly different. I have had discussions with Lord Morrow, and we have exchanged letters on the precise detailed contents of the Bill and on whether some of what Lord Morrow suggests is actually required or is particularly beneficial. I am determined to see that we have the strongest possible legislation, and I entirely take Mr Wells's point that we need to ensure that legislation is robust in Northern Ireland and in the Republic, given the opportunities for people to cross the border. We all know that Northern Ireland is, sadly, a destination for the victims of trafficking, as well as a transit point in both directions. The continuing discussions that I have with Alan Shatter — human trafficking features at, I think, every IGA meeting and at meetings between our officials — will ensure that we get the best possible joined-up system. The two of us have also discussed trafficking across the North Channel with Kenny MacAskill, the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Justice.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as na freagraí. Thanks very much to the Minister, too. Can the Minister give us some indication of the extent of the work on information sharing and the like that has been progressed on the registered offenders' group?

Mr Ford: I am happy to give Mr McGlone a limited progress report in the sense that the information-sharing agreement dealing with children at risk and domestic violence victims has been drafted and is being considered by legal advisers in both jurisdictions. It is a fair priority for the group, which is chaired by the PSNI and the Garda Síochána, and is being looked at quite seriously by them. I cannot give him a precise timing for when we expect that to come back from the legal advisers.

Lord Morrow: My question is also about human trafficking and is not dissimilar to that from my colleague Jim Wells. Bearing in mind that the House has already passed unanimously the findings of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) report into human trafficking, can the Minister tell us today to what extent, if any, the GRETA report has featured in discussions that he has had with his Southern counterparts?

Mr Ford: I think that the answer to that is that the specific issues of the GRETA report, which was a report on the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and not a report on cross-border arrangements, have not featured in the discussions that I have had with Alan Shatter. I am not sure whether the GRETA report has featured in officials' discussions, but the important issue is that we get the best possible arrangements, North and South, and that we join up North and South and with England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr McDevitt: The proposal to establish a National Crime Agency by the Westminster Government will undoubtedly have an impact on certain aspects of all-island policing.

Has that matter been discussed with the Southern Minister? If so, are there specific issues of which he believes the House will need to be made aware?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr McDevitt for that question. He will be aware that issues around the National Crime Agency have featured significantly in discussions and correspondence that I have had with the Home Secretary in recent times and that those issues will potentially be before the House in the near future. The potential implications of the National Crime Agency are as yet unclear, because it is unclear what the Home Office proposals will be for Northern Ireland. The issue has certainly been flagged in my discussions with Alan Shatter, and it may be that it will require more detailed consideration when we see the Home Office's final proposals.

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

Mr Allister: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Sorry. I apologise to the Member.

Mr Allister: The Minister tells us that the victims' group is next going to focus on the EU victims directive. Given that the prevailing definition of "victim" in the Northern Ireland legislation is incompatible with the definition in the EU directive, will the Minister be supportive of measures to bring our definition into line with that in the EU directive?

Mr Ford: Mr Allister makes a certain assumption. I am not in a position to confirm whether that is the case, but I am determined to ensure that the EU directive is brought into force in this jurisdiction within the appropriate timescale.

11.15 am

Salmon Conservation

Ms Ni Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): I apologise again to the House for not being able to deliver the statement yesterday, and I appreciate the work of the Business Committee and Members in allowing me to make the statement today.

I make this statement to the Assembly today to advise Members on a range of salmon conservation measures that I am introducing to protect wild salmon in my Department's jurisdiction. Salmon conservation is a subject that has generated a great deal of attention and debate. I value the interest and contribution made by Members, the Culture, Arts and Leisure Committee and a wide range of stakeholders, including the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum, on the best approach to address the challenges in protecting wild salmon stocks.

My statement to the Assembly on 12 March this year set out the grounds for concern: international scientists have confirmed that wild Atlantic salmon are dying at sea in significant numbers; southern stocks, including some in North America and Europe, are threatened with extinction; my Department's Bushmills salmon station shows a decline in salmon returning to the River Bush from around 30% prior to 1997 to less than 5% today; there is scientific evidence that salmon fishing off the north coast is bringing in fish from areas protected under the EC habitats directive; and other monitored rivers across the North have failed to achieve their conservation limits in most years since 2002. Continuing to authorise such exploitation is unsustainable and would be inconsistent with the Department's obligations under the EC habitats directive and our commitments to the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation. That could lead to infraction fines being imposed by the EC.

Members will recall that, earlier this year, I called on all key stakeholders to commit to a range of voluntary measures to minimise the killing of salmon and to allow the Department to consult on measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of wild salmon stocks. I am pleased to report to the Assembly that there was a positive response by coastal netmen, and they did not fish for salmon during the 2012 season. I am also pleased to report that most recreational anglers acted responsibly in adopting the voluntary catch-and-release policy during the 2012 season. Those measures have undoubtedly resulted in a significant reduction in the number of salmon being killed.

The Department's public consultation on longer-term measures has now been completed. Over 370 responses were received. The views of individuals accounted for 90% of responses, while 10% were from organisations purporting to represent the views of some 17,000 individuals. The key message that emerged was that 83% of respondents supported a total cessation of commercial salmon fishing and a total of 74% supported the introduction of mandatory catch and release for recreational angling.

Since then, my officials have consulted on the outcome of the consultation, including with the CAL Committee, the Department's advisory stakeholder group and the Salmon and Inland Fisheries Forum. Forum members, for the most part, supported a total cessation of commercial netting

and the introduction of mandatory catch and release for rod-caught salmon. The forum also advised that it would welcome a review mechanism that would consider the possibility of allowing the taking of fish should stocks recover to an abundant level at some stage in the future.

I have given a great deal of thought to the views expressed by the various stakeholder interests. I have reflected on the international and local scientific advice and the position adopted by Inland Fisheries Ireland and the Loughs Agency in deciding on a way forward. I believe that the suite of new conservation measures that I am announcing today are appropriate, equitable, enforceable and essential to conserving and protecting wild salmon stocks in the future.

First, I will consider the commercial fishing of wild salmon. In doing so, I recognise that the continuation of commercial fishing for salmon is a complex and contentious issue. Fishermen have harvested salmon for hundreds of years off the north Antrim and County Down coasts. These traditional fisheries have made an important contribution to supporting livelihoods and the economy and are an integral part of the culture and heritage of our coastal communities and a way of life. It is important to acknowledge and preserve that heritage. Netsmen themselves recognise fully that steps must be taken to conserve stocks to ensure the long-term survival of the species. They have shown that commitment by not fishing in 2012. There is a need to achieve a balance between conservation and fishing that may allow for the sustainable harvesting of salmon in the future, should stock levels permit it. Therefore, I will introduce legislation to impose a mandatory cessation of all commercial wild salmon fisheries to take effect from the 2014 season. That will remain in place until such times as scientific evidence confirms that there is a sustainable surplus of fish over conservation limits over a number of years.

Secondly, I now wish to consider recreational fishing for wild salmon. In doing so, I recognise that recreational angling provides important economic and social benefits. However, it is important that our fisheries are managed in a sustainable way in order that we may continue to benefit for many years to come. The unrestricted exploitation of our fish is against the public interest. I am pleased to say that many recreational anglers understand that and have, in general, supported my call for voluntary catch and release during the 2012 season. I am also aware that a number of private fishery owners have introduced mandatory catch and release on key rivers in the North. I welcome their leadership and acknowledge that, for some, that has had an impact on their businesses, with fewer anglers opting to fish.

In considering the way forward for recreational fishing for wild salmon, we currently have scientific data available for six index rivers in the DCAL jurisdiction indicating that they are not meeting their conservation limits. It is essential that catch and release for rod-caught salmon continues. I believe that catch and release represents a win-win solution, maintaining social and economic benefits while ensuring the continuation of salmon, short of a full cessation of fishing. Therefore, I will introduce legislation to impose mandatory catch and release throughout the DCAL jurisdiction with effect from the 2014 season. Those measures will also remain in place until such times as scientific evidence confirms that there is a sustainable surplus of fish over conservation limits. I have also decided

to limit the availability of salmon carcass tags to one per angler in the 2013 season, but I appeal to anglers to waive their rights to a tag in applying for their licence.

I will continue to impose catch and release in all DCAL public angling estate waters, and all salmon caught in those fisheries must be returned to the water unharmed. With the introduction of mandatory catch and release from the 2014 season, no carcass tags will be issued to anglers. In addition, I will introduce legislation to ban the sale of rod-caught salmon in the DCAL jurisdiction from 2013. Catch and release techniques do not, however, guarantee the survival of rod-caught salmon. Therefore, I will introduce legislation to improve survival rates for those salmon through the use of appropriate angling methods, equipment and techniques in accordance with internationally agreed best practice.

The consultation process also considered a range of temporal control measures — for example, a shorter season — to reduce exploitation. Scientific advice from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) is that that would produce a differential impact across the DCAL area, impacting on some rivers and regions more heavily than others. Given that, I am therefore not proposing to adopt a single, DCAL-wide temporal control measure at this stage.

Such measures are in addition to our ongoing work to ensure the sustainability of our fish stocks. The conservation and protection of salmon stocks and their habitats are central to DCAL's work. The protection of wild fisheries remains a priority for my Department. We are currently engaged in a range of programmes to protect and conserve wild fisheries and their habitats and to fulfil our obligations under European Union directives and international commitments. My officials are also working with angling clubs on a number of projects to improve salmon habitats in selected rivers. We will continue that work. Furthermore, we have a robust enforcement strategy in place to protect fish stocks and prevent illegal fishing. We will further that work in tandem with new conservation policies. I will continue to commit departmental resources to fisheries with a focus on conservation, protection and enforcement in future.

The measures that I have outlined today will be implemented in a proactive and timely manner. My officials are drafting new subordinate regulations, in conjunction with the Departmental Solicitor's Office, that will involve amending or recasting at least four sets of existing regulations and introducing a further three. That is, by necessity, a complex and lengthy process, and it will include consulting the CAL Committee, commercial fishing and recreational angling interests and other stakeholders. Taking into account the necessary time frame to allow for that engagement, it is proposed that the new legislation should be in place in time for the 2014 season. In the interim, the voluntary conservation measures that applied in 2012 and proved effective will continue to be enhanced.

In summary, I propose a continuation and enhancement of the current conservation measures to protect wild salmon, including voluntary catch and release and no commercial netting in the 2013 season; the introduction of legislation for the cessation of commercial netting for wild salmon to take effect from 2014; the introduction of a ban on the sale of rod-caught salmon from 2013; and the introduction of legislation for the mandatory catch and release of wild salmon for recreational angling to take effect from 2014.

There is a groundswell of opinion among all stakeholders that measures need to be taken to support wild salmon stocks. The changes announced today positively respond to the challenges facing the future of salmon stocks. The approach aims to preserve fish stocks in a responsible, sustainable and equitable manner. That reflects my strong commitment to championing the issue. I am determined to continue to regulate fisheries and to conserve and enhance fish habitats to ensure that commercial and recreational fisheries are sustainable and deliver benefits to all.

I believe that the measures are fair, balanced, enforceable and essential in conserving and protecting wild salmon now and for future generations. This approach will position the North at the forefront of salmon conservation policy. To succeed, we will need the continued support of commercial netmen and anglers working together to ensure that we achieve our shared objective.

I thank the Assembly for the opportunity to update Members on these important measures and will keep Members and the CAL Committee informed of progress.

Miss M McIlveen (The Chairperson of the Committee for Culture, Arts and Leisure): I welcome the statement and thank your office, Mr Speaker, for allowing it to be heard today.

On Thursday, the Committee received a briefing on the proposals from the Minister's officials. Although the Committee was broadly supportive of the proposals to legislate on the issue, members expressed concerns about some aspects of the proposals. Those concerns included the timetable for implementing legislation, the enforcement of the proposals and, in particular, the voluntary buy-in from fishermen for next year. Will the Minister confirm whether she considers the timescale for implementing the legislation to be achievable? Will she clarify what measures her Department will take to engage with key stakeholders to ensure that there is better implementation of the proposals?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for her question. Again, it is proposed that the legislation will be in place for autumn 2013, in time for the start of the 2014 season. It is essential that we, in fact, acknowledge and pay tribute to anglers, in particular, for their ongoing practice. Anglers were effectively practising catch and release for salmon well before we introduced the measure in the House in March this year. I acknowledge their contribution to salmon stocks and their ongoing support for the measure. It is crucial that we have the legislation in place for 2014. At this stage, I have no reason to believe that that will not be achieved — in fact, quite the opposite.

Mr McMullan: I thank the Minister for a comprehensive report. Will she tell the House why the Department has decided to restrict anglers to one salmon carcass tag while giving them the option to waive their right to take a tag? Go raibh maith agat.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I suspect that that will be raised time and time again. As an angler, the Member will be aware that it is an offence to be in possession of a salmon carcass without the appropriate tag.

In previous years, anglers purchasing any game fishing licence were issued with up to 10 carcass tags at a time.

It has been decided to restrict anglers to one carcass tag at a time for the 2013 season to support those voluntary conservation measures. Anglers will be issued with other carcass tags on request and on production of a completed log book indicating details of their catch.

11.30 am

I know, and I am sure that the Member knows, that many game anglers do not want to fish for salmon. They have stated that they do not wish to take tags because of that. However, the Department received legal advice that tags must be issued to prevent anglers from being prosecuted for the killing of a fish. The Department is giving anglers the option to waive their rights to salmon carcass tags, and the licence that will be issued for 2013 has been amended to allow that. Anglers will be aware of that when they apply for their 2013 licence.

Mr McGimpsey: We welcome the Minister's statement and the general thrust on the way forward for the next two years and look forward to the legislation being in place. Will she assure the House that, as a small Department, she has the resource of a Bill team to draft the legislation and bring it forward? How will her legislation affect the Fisheries Act (Northern Ireland) 1966, which we operate under?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I also agree that it is a good news story. I thank Members for their patience for the statement being made today.

I will take the Member's last point first. The new bill will look at the Fisheries Act 1966 and possibly the 1972 European legislation. In answer to the Member's first question: I do have confidence. He is more than aware that the Department is small, but a Bill team will be put in place, and additional staff if required, because the legislation is a priority for the Department and for me.

I am confident that my current resources are appropriate to deliver the legislation for 2014. However, if additional staff are needed at any stage of the legislation being brought forward, I am committed to ensuring that those staff are provided.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht a ráitis. Tá géarghá leis na miosúir chaomhnaithe a luaigh sí ar maidin.

I agree with the Minister that there is a need for the measures that she outlined. Since the origin of the problem is further out to sea, what is she doing with other north Atlantic nations to ensure that the problem is tackled not only at home but on an international basis?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I assure him that DCAL's commitments — indeed, obligations — to conserve salmon are shared with international best practice. DCAL's salmon management strategy is aligned and in keeping with the agreement that we reached with NASCO. The thrust and the core function is the conservation, management and exploitation of our fisheries and resources. As part of the management strategy, DCAL provides data from AFBI to comply with our commitments and obligations.

National and international conservation and best practice are crucial to ensuring that we as legislators and governments do everything that we can to protect wild species such as salmon.

Ms Lo: I very much welcome the Minister's statement and the measures that she proposes. I congratulate her on taking on the role as a champion for the conservation of wild salmon. I hope that we have learned from the threat in Strangford lough when, because the modiolus was so damaged, it was almost too late.

Has the Minister had any discussion about, or made plans for, commercial fishermen? Will they be compensated? What measures will there be to help them and ease the problem of the ban?

Ms Ní Chuilín: The sequencing was that I would make the announcement today in the House following a discussion with the CAL Committee last week. Discussions with commercial netmen are ongoing and will continue, particularly after today.

I repeat what I said in my statement: I am acutely aware of the heritage and value that netmen and commercial fishermen and fisheries have passed down from one generation to another. I will do everything that I can to try to assist the process so that everyone is happy, but my obligation is to conserve wild Atlantic salmon. I have scientific evidence that proves that most salmon are taken from the sea, not just in our jurisdiction but in others where salmon are protected under the EU habitats directive. My officials and I already have in place arrangements to talk to salmon netmen and commercial netmen.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Minister for her statement. Under catch and release, up to 50% of salmon returned to the water do not survive. The Minister said in her statement that she would introduce legislation to improve the survival rates of those salmon. Does the Minister agree that every effort must be made to reduce the number of salmon that do not survive?

Ms Ní Chuilín: I agree with the Member, and it is not just about catch and release. It is equally important to look at fishing methods and the habitats of fish that survive. We are looking at options, particularly with anglers, and at the environments in which fishing takes place, to try to improve them. We are even looking at the methods of fishing to ensure that we do not put dead fish back into the water and, in fact, that we do not catch fish at all.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas sin. I thank the Minister for her statement. As a lifelong angler, I can say that the introduction of legislation for the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon is broadly welcomed in angling circles. For too many years, we have witnessed its decline. I would like the Minister to tease out further the methods that will be used to optimise the survival rates of salmon when they are caught and released back into rivers.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question, which follows on from the previous one. Fishing methods are really, really important. It is all very well me asking people to continue with a voluntary catch-and-release scheme, but I am, in addition, asking anglers to use only single, barbless hooks. I am reliably informed that barbed hooks can easily be converted to barbless — I really should not know this stuff, but I do — by pinching the barb with pliers. Treble hooks should not be used and can be removed from spinners and other lures and replaced with single, barbless hooks. Equally, it is important to recognise that, of all methods, fly fishing has caused the least harm to fish in

the past. If a fish is caught by hook, it is easier to return it unharmed to the water if you use a single, barbless hook.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to develop Mr Bradley's question. A lot of resource has gone into work and research programmes in countries such as Scotland and Norway. Will the Minister and the Department take the opportunity to look at long-term measures in those other jurisdictions?

Ms Ní Chuilín: In short, we absolutely will. Other jurisdictions have a very good conservation record, which it certainly would be foolish to ignore. We are working with other countries on the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. Not only will we continue that work, but we would greatly welcome any information or advice that they can share with us in preparation for the legislation.

Mr Swann: I thank the Minister for her statement and congratulate her on the distance that we have come in a year. I pay tribute to the organisations that have lobbied and done a lot of work towards what we have achieved so far. However, I am a little bit concerned. The Minister is refusing to look at introducing a temporal restriction across all the DCAL waters. Will she consider looking into local temporal restrictions, if necessary?

Ms Ní Chuilín: To be totally honest, the answer is that I do not know. I congratulate the Member, who is a committed angler, on the work that he did with angling clubs to ensure that the consultation period was used to best effect. Introducing limits at this stage would place some anglers at a disadvantage to others. This is about trying to bring everybody along at the same time, not giving more people a leg up and holding other people back. I will ask my officials to investigate what the Member asked. At this stage, however, I am not sure.

Mr Byrne: Like others, I very much welcome the Minister's statement. I recognise the good work that has happened over the past year or year and a half. Are the six index rivers six different river systems or are they individual rivers? I live on the Foyle system, and we have about four or five individual rivers. I am concerned that all of them could be affected.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. Unfortunately, the Foyle is in the jurisdiction of the Loughs Agency and Inland Fisheries Ireland. The rivers that we are responsible for are, among others, the Bush, Glendun, Shimna, Maine, Blackwater and Garvary. I share the Member's concern. This has been raised before, but when we talk about tourism, particularly around angling, there may be a perception that some are given more of an advantage than others, but I have the duty and obligation to look after only the rivers in the public angling estate.

Mr Humphrey: I thank the Minister for her statement. How does her Department propose to police and enforce the proposals that she has detailed today? What assessment has the Department made of the potential cost to the tourism industry in Northern Ireland as a result of the proposals?

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's record on enforcement has been quite good. Indeed, it has been acknowledged in the House that fisheries and protection officers have unfortunately borne the brunt of physical and verbal abuse for using their enforcement powers.

I am not really too sure about the tourism issue. Protection, enforcement and tourism have always been done in

partnership. It has to be acknowledged that anglers have been, and will continue to be, the guardians of the river. I am not taking that commitment for granted. All the potential for tourism and further opportunities to fish need to be explored, but we need to take these measures. Anglers, above all else, have been the most responsible and best protectors of our rivers. That needs to be acknowledged. My Department will not be found wanting in reaching its commitments and fulfilling its obligations.

Lord Morrow: Does the Minister want to ban angling altogether? She talked in her statement about “temporary” and a “period of time”, but she does not state how long that period is to be. I acknowledge that enforcement around this is a very dangerous practice. I pay tribute to those who have been doing it, but enforcement is the issue. The Minister’s Department needs to be up for it to ensure that those who have fished legally are not penalised and that those who are doing it illegally are brought to task.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. I am not for banning angling. This is about the conservation of wild Atlantic salmon. The Member, as a keen angler, will know that the stocks are depleted. The species is in danger of becoming extinct. It is not consistent to promote voluntary catch and release with a view to bringing in mandatory catch and release for the 2014 season without taking that into consideration. It is about the long-term sustainability and viability of the stocks, not about penalising anglers.

I acknowledge the last point that the Member made. The anglers who have fished legally have borne the brunt for people who have fished illegally. They are the people who feed information to and work with our Department and other agencies to ensure that illegal fishing on our rivers and shores stops. They have supported our enforcement officers, where possible, around safety issues and in areas where there has been an upsurge in or particular problem of illegal fishing.

Above all, I do not want to bring measures forward that look at conservation and ignore the fact that there is illegal fishing on our rivers. I am not doing that. Where appropriate, if additional enforcement resources are needed — they have not been required thus far — I will make sure that they are provided as well. That is because we must look at the overall conservation on the river and not just at one aspect while ignoring others; we have to look at the entire package. At this stage, we cannot ignore the scientific evidence in front of us, which concludes that the stocks are so endangered that we have to do something.

11.45 am

Mr Beggs: I, too, thank the Minister for her statement and welcome the restrictions, which will improve the hope for conservation of fishing for the future. She has banned commercial net fishing off the coast at north Antrim and County Down. What discussions has she had with others, and can she ensure us that others will be stopping net fishing on other parts? Her policy would seem strange if net fishing were to continue in other water systems.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I thank the Member for his question. However, this has been raised before, and I have only the ability, obligation and indeed duty to place restrictions in areas for which I and my Department are responsible. We

will be meeting stakeholder groups to look at the issue that the Member raised. The evidence that I have is consistent with all the agencies and stakeholders being in favour of preserving wild Atlantic salmon. They are very committed to doing that and want to do everything in partnership with the Department and other bodies and agencies to ensure that that happens. As part of that, we will have ongoing discussions. Nevertheless, I hear what the Member says, and our Department can take action to fulfil my obligations in areas under my jurisdiction.

Mr Allister: I certainly endorse the banning of commercial fishing of salmon off our coast because that is a win-win for salmon stocks. However, in circumstances where there is a high mortality rate with catch and release — perhaps the Minister can tell us her advice on the height of that mortality rate — is that the way to go? If we go down the road of mandatory catch and release, what will the impact be on our tourist industry? She said in answer to someone else that she was not really sure. Surely, before she comes to the House with a policy such as this, she needs to be sure whether there will be an impact on our tourist industry.

Ms Ní Chuilín: I do not know if the Member was in the House when I answered questions from William Irwin and Cathal Ó hOisín about the methods that anglers are using to ensure better mortality rates for wild Atlantic salmon. We looked at methods such as the use of hooks in the returning of fish, which will actually improve the survival of salmon.

I am not responsible for tourism per se. I am responsible for my part of the overall tourist product. The anglers and other stakeholders are also very keen to ensure that every step is taken to promote the use of rivers for angling as part of the overall tourist product. At the end of the day, however, we and I have an obligation and a duty to ensure the preservation of wild Atlantic salmon. I believe that these are positive measures and that, more than anyone, fishermen and anglers do their best to ensure the survival of wild Atlantic salmon through the present voluntary catch-and-release policy and will have no difficulty with its mandatory use. That was one of the things that consistently came up during the consultation this year.

Planning: Narrow Water Bridge

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): May I thank you personally, Mr Speaker, for your assistance and advice in respect of how to take this matter forward, and I thank those in the Assembly who have provided me with the time to make the statement this morning.

In compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to make this statement on the approved planning application for the Narrow Water bridge project. I am taking the somewhat exceptional step of coming to the House to explain, and to take questions about, a single planning application. I am doing so because the integrity of the planning process for the Narrow Water bridge, which has been called into question, is, in my very strong view, unassailable. I am also doing so because it has been reported in the media, particularly in the BBC, that there was “a political smell” around the planning application. As far as I am aware, no one has taken the opportunity to correct that. To use the words that a Minister of this Chamber used a couple of weeks ago, the application requires a “thorough” investigation.

Given that, the importance of the bridge proposal, and that the project is, as I speak, under very active consideration, I am making this statement to confirm the facts, to rebut that which is wrong and to ensure that a right planning decision will result in the right outcome for the people of Down and Louth.

So, let me address the facts. Louth County Council submitted a full application for a new single-carriageway, cable-stayed opening bridge across the Newry river at Narrow Water, Warrenpoint on 9 February 2012. That application was transboundary, and a separate application had been submitted to, and was subsequently approved in, the Republic of Ireland.

The proposal involves a new single-carriageway, cable-stayed opening bridge across the Newry river that will tie in to the existing A2 roundabout at Narrow Water, Warrenpoint. It will be an opening bridge that will allow tall ships, leisure craft and other marine vessels access to the Victoria Lock and the Albert Basin in Newry. The bridge will be a link between the Cooley peninsula area in County Louth and the Warrenpoint and Mourne area in County Down, with its main objective being to promote the socio-economic development of the area through improved community interaction and enhanced tourist amenity.

The application was accompanied by an environmental statement and was made the subject of article 31 procedure. All appropriate procedures were carried out. Most Members will know that article 31 cases are major planning applications that fall to be decided by the planning Minister personally. Having assessed the application and all the environmental information, having visited the site, familiar though I was with it, and having assessed comments from consultees, the council and the public, I was content that planning permission should be granted, subject to appropriate planning conditions. I am also satisfied that the application was processed in the correct manner and in line with departmental procedures.

One of the reasons why I am satisfied that the application was processed in the correct manner is because a Minister of this Executive raised with me a number of questions about the planning process in this case. My understanding

of the planning file meant that I was able to address those questions definitively when that Minister raised them with me. I answered those questions on Friday 30 November, and I did so to ensure that there was no delay in the Department of Finance and Personnel’s (DFP) consideration of the project. In doing so, however, I made it clear that I advised the relevant Minister that, in my judgement, his questions were outwith DFP’s authority. Nonetheless, to move the project to a satisfactory conclusion, I answered those questions comprehensively.

The answers that I provided addressed questions on the timing of the application, consultees’ advice and other issues. I have with me the note that I provided to the Minister concerned. I have to say that, having provided that information on Friday 30 November, it is unsatisfactory that another Minister failed to refer to those answers in a subsequent Assembly debate only four days later. What is the point of one Minister providing good advice to another only for it to be disregarded and not referred to in a subsequent debate that touched on the very issues on which questions had originally been asked? Indeed, in that Tuesday’s Assembly debate, there was a complaint that:

“we have never had an article 31 planning application, with all the sensitivities that are involved in this one, dealt with so quickly.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 80, p66, col 2].

That refers to the Narrow Water bridge application. I do not know precisely what sensitivities are referred to in that quotation, but I must presume that it refers to the matters raised with me by that Minister. If so, as I have outlined, I answered the questions. I did so on a Friday, yet, as I said, four days later, on the Tuesday, they were not referred to in a Ministerial reply to an Assembly motion.

Furthermore, in a contribution to that Tuesday Assembly debate on Narrow Water, the replying Minister stated:

“This was an article 31 planning application, so it was decided and signed off by the planning Minister. He may want to correct me on this, but we have never had an article 31 planning application, with all the sensitivities that are involved in this one, dealt with so quickly.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 80, p66, col 2].

Let me repeat:

“we have never had an article 31 planning application, with all the sensitivities that are involved in this one, dealt with so quickly.” — [Official Report, Bound Volume 80, p66, col 2].

So what did I do? I requested a review of planning files to identify article 31 applications signed off by the planning Minister and dealt with quickly. The list is extensive: IKEA at Hollywood Exchange; an industrial development at Carnbane in Newry; a shopping development in Northcott in Glengormley; a high school in County Down — that decision was taken in five months — and an INI business park in Strabane. So the evidence, contrary to the assertions made on the Floor of the Chamber, is that article 31 applications have been approved in six months or less and other non-article 31 applications, such as that for the Peace Bridge in Derry, have been also. I will save people’s blushes by not identifying the Minister or Ministers who approved the aforementioned article 31 applications in six months or less.

As you are aware, the Executive made a commitment in the Programme for Government that, by 2015, 90% of large-scale investment decisions would be made within six months and applications with job creation potential would be given extra weight. The particular target for this year in respect of those large-scale investment decisions is 60%. I have made it clear to my planning officials that I expect that commitment to be achieved — indeed, I expect it to be surpassed.

I support the Executive's commitment in that regard. It will come as no surprise to hear that other Ministers, whom I will not name, do so also, so it is surprising that a commitment entered into and delivered on in one planning application — namely, Narrow Water — is then portrayed as being, "dealt with so quickly". Rather than disparage and question the process and decision, it should be held up as an example of good practice, good performance and good planning. I hope that the House will agree.

It has further been contended that the Narrow Water application was dealt with by me as Minister and:

"was dealt with very shortly — and, indeed, it was signed off on the day that the committee",

That is the SEUPB committee,

"met, which was 24 October 2012." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 80, p67, col 1].

Again, that contention is incorrect. I made my intention to approve the application as an article 31 application on 12 October this year, and the notice to that effect was issued on 24 October. The comments made in the House by a Minister in response to the Narrow Water debate do not acknowledge that the decision was made in advance of 24 October, was announced in advance of 24 October and was publicly confirmed on 12 October. I believe in telling the full story, and conveying the full picture and the full details. Others should do likewise.

In any case, the date of submission of the Narrow Water Application — February 2012 — and the date of my decision do not tell the full story. As part of a healthy planning process, in significant applications, and particularly in the future as part of the planning Bill that I urgently wish to bring before the Assembly, pre-application discussions (PADs) will be embedded in the planning process. That PAD approach was part of the history of the application. By discussing the proposal in advance, the formal application process can be facilitated to a quicker conclusion. The PAD in this case began in June 2008, and there are records of meetings and PAD discussions held in the subsequent period in order to anticipate any planning issues that might arise once that planning application was submitted.

12.00 noon

The Narrow Water project did not emerge like a bolt from the blue in February 2012. It has been nurtured over decades, discussed over years and decided over months. This is the full story of Narrow Water.

This was a good planning decision, made in good time and on good grounds. Every month, I sit down with my senior planners to interrogate all article 31 applications. For one or other particular applications, that happens weekly. It is worth commenting that the representations that were made on the article 31 application for Narrow Water were not of a

scale compared with any article 31 retail application in any part of Northern Ireland, for those relating to Rose Energy or other applications.

In my judgement, the reason is self-evident. This proposal attracts cross-community and cross-border support. This planning application builds trade, tourism and relationships. Europe and Dublin want to support the application, and Belfast should support it.

It is hard to fathom why a few people want to impede its progress. Certainly, let us interrogate the evidence, if that is done on proper grounds. However, in doing so, we should not claim anything other than that the planning decision was robust, thorough, evidence-based and consistent with law, policy and good practice.

There is no smell around this process and decision. There are only the standards of good planning, good practice and good government.

Lord Morrow: I listened intently to what the Minister had to say. The more he speaks, the more he digs himself into a hole. Will he bring the same swiftness to all article 31 applications, some of which have been lying in his Department for 10 years? I know that he has not been there for 10 years, but he now has an opportunity to show how swift he is on all these applications.

There is a smell around this one. He may try to deny that, but it seems very strange that the application was lodged on 9 February, and the Minister has it all done and dusted within a couple of months. Is he now telling us today that, from this day forth, all article 31 applications will be dealt with as swiftly as he has dealt with this application? If he does that, he will go some distance towards allaying Members' concerns.

Mr Attwood: It is a matter of regret that irregular and false words, in my view, have been used, and I want to tread cautiously here, Mr Speaker, so correct me if you think that I am going too far, because sometimes I can go too far. It is inappropriate to repeat an assertion that has been comprehensively, robustly and firmly rebutted in my statement and which does not reflect the content of that statement on this planning application.

Let me repeat: there is no political smell. This process was absolutely proper. The PAD was absolutely proper, as was the process from February until the decision later in the autumn. Any contention otherwise is unhelpful and inaccurate. I suggest that those who continue to use the language of there being a smell are digging a series of holes, looking for the deepest one and jumping into it.

I am under a Programme for Government commitment that, this year, 60% of new article 31 applications will be handled within six months and that, by 2015, 90% will be handled within six months. Those are challenging but realistic targets.

What will be the story of article 31 applications this year, Lord Morrow? Another two article 31 applications have been submitted since this one in February 2012. I did not get this decision over the line in six months; it took seven months. There were two subsequent article 31 applications in June 2012 for which I will try to live up to the six-month rule. I will achieve that before Christmas on one application and may do so on both. If that goes some way towards reassuring those who continue to harbour doubts, I am pleased to give that reassurance.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Cuirim fáilte roimh an ráiteas seo ón Aire. I welcome the Minister's statement, which very clearly outlines the timeline and the process. I was at the An Bord Pleanála hearing and can assure the House that it was very rigorous. From the Minister's statement, it is obvious that he, too, has carried out a rigorous process. Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to Warrenpoint, Burren and Rostrevor Chamber of Commerce, which has done so much?

I will put on record that I was on the programme that the Minister mentioned and did challenge the comments about a "political smell". Those were very unfortunate comments, and I accused the Minister in question — I will not name him either — of scaremongering.

Mr Attwood: Go raibh maith agat. The Member captures both the rigour of the process in the North and the rigour of the process in the South. If a Member asserts that there is a political smell about the planning application in the North, it follows, does it not, that they are making the same assertion about the planning application in the South? That is despite the fact that the applications were lodged on the same day by Louth County Council, as it is a transboundary matter. As the Member said, that would be a very unfortunate and, potentially, scaremongering assertion. In all other regards, I endorse the Member's comments.

Mr Elliott: It is quite interesting that we meagre MLAs are being given a taste of Executive business on the Floor of the House. It is an interesting debate between Ministers.

The Minister made a point about the Executive commitment in the Programme for Government that 90% of large-scale decisions would be made within six months. Is the Minister aware of any allegations or suggestions, within the Department or outside, that planning officials put applicants under pressure to withdraw applications at some stages so that the Department's figures remained appropriate?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. This is not a matter of getting a taste of Executive business. It is a matter of a process that was true and robust being portrayed as something other than true and robust. This is not a spat between Executive Ministers. It is fundamentally about accountability, oversight and good process. This decision will fall fully on the right side of that argument, and I will try to ensure that other decisions of the planning system do so, too. Anybody who asserts otherwise is straying into narrow politics, when this should be about big ambitions and the hopes of the people of this island for trade, tourism and better relationships, which, in my view, are what Narrow Water symbolises.

I note what the Member said. There are reasons why an applicant may want to withdraw a planning application. It may be because, if they do not withdraw it, it will be refused. It may be because, if they withdraw it, they will be able to reapply without incurring the costs of a full application. So there are good reasons, which serve the interest of agents and applicants, why they may be advised that the wiser counsel is to withdraw.

If there is any assertion or evidence — I would welcome hearing evidence as opposed to assertions — that people's arms are being twisted, I would like to hear it. That would not be good practice, and I would not tolerate it. However, I think that it is right and proper for

the planning system to give advice to agents, applicants and developers that the wiser counsel is to withdraw in advance of the resubmission of a different application.

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the Minister's statement. The people of south Down and Louth believe that the decision was right. They believe that, as the Minister said, it is an example of good practice and good planning.

I welcome the pre-application discussions that took place between June 2008 and February 2012 and before the full application. I also welcome the fact that you state that you wish those pre-application discussions to be part of the planning Bill that you wish to bring before the Assembly. Given that, in my opinion and that of the people of south Down, the Narrow Water bridge project application is a fine example of how to come to a decision through the PAD process, how can anyone claim that the process was anything other than correct?

Mr Attwood: I welcome the Member's comments about the pre-application discussion. That should be the required practice for significant applications and for applications that may be of less significance. The more that you embed in the planning process the conversation between an applicant or developer and the local community that will be affected, adversely or otherwise, by a planning application, the better that the planning process will be and the more likely that it will be that an agreed outcome is reached. I want to see that in place as a matter of practice. However, if the Executive sign off on the planning Bill this Thursday, it will come to the Chamber in January. If passed into law, it will mean that, when it comes to significant planning applications, community consultation or the PAD process is a requirement. That will be a statutory requirement, not an add-on or an option, and that will only improve understanding of the planning process and achieve a better outcome.

The project will see the first cross-border bridge since partition built and provide opportunities for trade and tourism. It can deepen relations between Louth and Down, generally in the border area and on the island. Do we not need to deepen relationships and demonstrate that we can do so, given the turbulence of the past days? I am hoping that wiser counsel will prevail and that the authority of both the planning process and the SEUPB process will be recognised. If the bridge is realised and built by the end of 2015, it will show good authority to the Governments, North and South.

Ms Lo: I would hate to see this project become a political football, with parties point-scoring over it. Given the events of last week, the public are looking to us to show leadership, promote community relations and promote our economy in order to create jobs. The project is a good one.

What steps is the Minister going to take to talk to the Minister of Finance and Personnel to try to address the issues and concerns that he expressed last week about the timing of the project and whether we can complete it in time so that we are not liable for its full cost? Those are the Minister of Finance and Personnel's real concerns. I would like to see the two Ministers working together and providing leadership for all of us rather than fighting over the project.

Mr Attwood: First, I thank the Member for taking up the theme of my previous answer. When it comes to trade and jobs, tourism and jobs and relationship-building between

Louth and Down, in the wider border area and on this island, the project covers all the bases. That is why, given that it has that scale and potential, I would like to think that all of us will get to the point of endorsing it.

There was no issue raised about the project until very late on. As far as I am aware, no issue was raised about the planning process or the SEUPB process until recently. It was a settled matter. Yes, the two Governments, North and South, on the far side of the SEUPB decision had to make their own judgements about whether they could contribute the relatively small sums of money needed to make the project happen, because liability for 25% of the funding for the project falls to the Dublin and Belfast Governments. Until very late on, there was no issue raised in the planning system or over the outcome of the SEUPB process.

It is for others to say why the matter has now attracted such attention and controversy. I have tried to provide good answers to questions raised by others to further settle the matter, to ease their concerns and to ensure that the project moves forward positively. Even though, in my view, questions that were asked were outwith the authority of another Minister, I, nonetheless, provided that information to communicate with that Minister and to see the project move forward. That is a sign of good faith and good intentions, and I would like others to show the same.

12.15 pm

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I congratulate the Minister on the businesslike way in which he has dealt with this application and other article 31 applications and thank him for fumigating some of the words that were spoken about the issue during the Assembly debate. I welcome, of course, the support of the Irish Government and the SEUPB for the project. Will the Minister join with me in urging our Executive to take this opportunity to bring the project forward without any delay so that we can realise the full benefits of it for the tourism industry, for trade and commerce and for the people of south Down and County Louth?

Mr Attwood: I agree with the sentiment of Mr Bradley's comments. The Executive, as with the Cabinet in Dublin, should get behind the project. It is my understanding — this may refer back to the question asked by Ms Lo — that it is not a requirement that all the moneys for the project that are drawn down from Europe have to be spent by April 2015. It is my understanding that moneys can be spent up to December 2015. We need to confirm that. Furthermore, it is my understanding that, at the end of December 2015, if, for example, 80% of the moneys had been drawn down and spent on the Narrow Water bridge but the bridge was not finished, Europe will not seek to reclaim the moneys. An impression may have been created that we were subject to some critical time frames in terms of April 2015 and the potential of the budget for that bridge falling to the two Governments North and South. It is my understanding that that may not be the case. I would welcome being corrected on that, but I assure Members that I checked and double-checked it in two places of authority in Europe.

I understand that, technically and in construction terms, the bridge can be built, and given the somewhat moderate contribution that has to come from the North, given that we still have three years to get the bridge completed and constructed and given the goodwill that is all around us in Europe and from European funding sources, I want

to, as Mr Bradley indicated, see the matter satisfactorily concluded and want the Executive to endorse the proposal.

Mr Allister: Maybe I should offer my services as an honest broker between the warring Environment Minister and the Finance Minister. Maybe not.

In the Minister's expeditious consideration of the matter, what consideration did he give to the impact on local fishermen? Although my constituency is far removed from the location, I ask that question by virtue of the fact that I have, nonetheless, received representations from fishermen, who are also politically probably outside my constituency, raising concerns about the impact on the mussel beds in the location, concerns about the fact that there are statutory rights pertaining to Carlingford lough being a tidal waterway and concerns that no one has given any thought to the impact on their practice and performance as fishermen in the area. Can he tell us anything about his consideration of that?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member. The benefit of having a pre-application discussion is that you can scope out and identify any and all issues that might impact if planning approval is granted.

Therefore, I refer the Member in the first instance to the open file that exists on this matter, which scopes out all of the issues that are identified through the PAD discussions on the proposal. Because it is an open file, I refer the Member to all of the written responses from all of the in-house and external consultees, outlining all of the concerns and issues that might arise. Then, I refer the Member to the decision on the article 31 application, which outlines — save the Runkerry decision that was taken earlier this year — the range, extent and rigour of planning conditions that are required as a consequence of this approval going forward and in advance of the bridge being built or as a consequence of the bridge being built.

Be it the PAD, be it the consultation responses or be it the negative conditions and other conditions that are laid down in the approval itself, it is as extensive as I have come across among the article 31 applications that have been approved during my tenure in this office, save the Runkerry decision. The Runkerry decision and this one are very similar in that the environmental interest is asserted whatever its character. Consequently, this process and decision is exhaustive and covers the issues of water management, of when you can and cannot build, of navigation, of access to further into the Newry canal and of protecting all of the natural assets of that area, including the fishing interests and all of the concerns and bases that the Member raised.

Executive Committee Business

Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill: Final Stage

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): I beg to move

That the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill [NIA 7/11-15] do now pass.

When I addressed the House on 25 June at the beginning of the Second Stage of this Bill, I said that the story of the victims of institutional abuse had affected not only everyone in this Chamber but that it had gravely troubled the hearts of the people of this Province. We have heard many personal accounts of unspeakable torment. Children in institutions were in a particularly vulnerable position. They often had no one to turn to. They could not turn to anyone, and they had no one to trust but those who were entrusted for their care.

This is the bleak context that the inquiry into historical institutional abuse has been designed to both investigate and to address. We want to know fully what happened and what could have been done or should have been done to prevent it.

Importantly, it will conduct its work with an eye on the need to guard against future abuse, and it will make findings and recommendations about four specific matters.

First, on where institutions or the state failed in their duties towards children in care and whether these failings were systemic. Secondly, in respect of an apology. By that, I mean the nature of such an apology and by whom it should be made. Thirdly, in respect of whether there is a need for a memorial or a tribute to those who suffered. Lastly, in regard to any requirement or desirability for redress that might be provided by institutions or the Executive to meet the particular needs of victims.

The nature or level of any potential redress, whether it is financial or in the provision of services, is a matter that the Executive will discuss and agree once the inquiry has delivered its report and its findings.

The benefit of this legislation is that it puts the process of investigation and inquiry onto a firm statutory footing. The Bill enables and requires the chairperson to direct the inquiry's procedures and conduct in a fair and just manner, having regard also to the need to avoid any unnecessary cost to the public, witnesses or others. The inquiry also provides for an acknowledgement forum at which victims and survivors can speak in confidence about what happened to them. That is safeguarded by the provision of additional protection to the privacy of the forum's proceedings and the evidence that is disclosed to it.

As expected, the inquiry also includes an inquisitorial element in which the chairperson and his panel can examine evidence and question witnesses under oath. The Bill recognises that the public will have a legitimate interest in those proceedings and in the evidence examined. It requires the chairperson to take reasonable steps to ensure public access to this element of the inquiry. However, he may also issue orders to restrict access to its proceedings and evidence and to protect witnesses' identities.

We anticipate that most witnesses who are called to give evidence will do so willingly, but, where that is not the case, the Bill bestows on the chairperson powers to compel witnesses to appear before the inquiry and to compel evidence to be produced to it. It will be an offence to contravene a restriction order. It will also be an offence to deliberately alter or conceal evidence requested by the inquiry or which is likely to be of interest to it. The penalty will be a level-3 fine, £1,000, or six months' imprisonment or both.

The Executive, through the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM), will meet the inquiry's costs. With the Department's approval, the chairperson may make financial awards in respect of the legal or other expenses of particular witnesses. The Department will consult on rules setting out the conditions under which awards may be made.

When junior Minister Anderson and I came into office, the First and deputy First Minister asked us to make the historical institutional abuse inquiry one of our top priorities. I am pleased to say that progress has been rapid. The inquiry's terms of reference were announced on 31 May; on 12 June we introduced this Bill; and today, only five months later, it has reached its Final Stage.

While developing the inquiry, I had the privilege — and I mean the privilege — of working with victims and survivors. It was they who exposed the abuse and demanded an inquiry. Individual victims and survivors have also provided us with research information. They are using their own resources and networks to publicise the inquiry, and they are supporting others in registering with it. I take the opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their contribution and for the difference that they have been making to the task in which we have been engaged.

My profound thanks also go to Sir Anthony Hart. After a distinguished judicial career, Sir Anthony accepted the challenge of chairing and directing this inquiry. His wise and very practical advice has been of major help in strengthening the various facets of this Bill.

The political institutions in Northern Ireland have, sometimes, come under attack for an alleged slowness to enact legislation.

Lest anyone be in any doubt, I remind the House that the Bill has been drafted, agreed, introduced, scrutinised, amended and passed in just nine months. Work that began last Easter has concluded successfully as we approach Christmas. The speed of the process was due in no small part to the excellent co-operation that we received from a range of interested bodies. In particular, I thank the OFMDFM Committee for its diligent and insightful scrutiny. It consulted victims and survivors, expert organisations and the inquiry chairperson. It worked most productively and constructively with the Department, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister were pleased to accept all the Committee's proposals as amendments.

12.30 pm

I am also grateful to Committee members for their significant contributions to Assembly debates. The Office of the Legislative Counsel, the Departmental Solicitor's Office and OFMDFM officials have done an outstanding job. I am grateful to them and to the Assembly staff who supported the Bill through the process. Crucially,

the chairperson has a clear vision for the conduct of the inquiry, together with a well-structured plan. The acknowledgement forum is already up and running and began interviewing victims and survivors on 22 October. Enactment of the legislation today will give the chairperson the full range of powers that he needs to fulfil the terms of reference.

On behalf of the First Minister, the deputy First Minister and junior Minister McCann, I wish Sir Anthony and his team every success. Much of what came to light during the inquiry could be intensely distressing to those who hear of it or read it. However, it is the prayer of the Administration that the plight of the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse will be addressed and that appropriate measures will be taken to ensure the guaranteed future safety of our children. As a society, we will learn from this. I hope that the inquiry will, in the fullness of time, achieve some sense of lasting closure for those who walk through its doors in the weeks and months ahead. I commend the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill to the House.

Mr Nesbitt (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister):

I thank the Minister for his words. The Committee is more than happy to see the Bill reach the Floor for the final time. I thank Committee members. We often hear in the House and elsewhere in Northern Ireland the fine phrase of a process being "victim centred". From my experience, we gave meaning to that phrase in Committee deliberations over the past weeks and months. I thank, in particular, the victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse who came forward. As a former victims' commissioner of the Troubles, I have some experience of how difficult it can be for victims to come into the public domain, tell their stories and make their calls and recommendations. On behalf of the Committee, I pay tribute to all those who came forward. On behalf of the Committee, I also thank the junior Ministers, the Department and Committee staff for their role in bringing this forward.

The Committee's input to the Bill ultimately came down to a question of trust. We could have slowed down the process and pushed and pushed again for assurances on the exact meaning of words and paragraphs in the Bill, but we wanted to make sure that our deliberations did not slow down the Bill to the point at which it went into the next calendar year. It was our determination that we would play our part in enabling the Bill to come before the House before Christmas recess, and we have achieved that, because here we are on this day.

Rather than push and push and push, we pushed and pushed and then decided to trust, because who on earth would want a process that abused the already abused? We achieved some major amendments, which the Minister referred to, but, before I mention those, on behalf of the Committee I thank Sir Anthony Hart and his inquiry team. Without breaking the confidence of papers that are to come before the Committee tomorrow, I can say that, last week, the Committee discussed a relatively small matter. When we made an enquiry, not only did we get an answer within the week but we got a fulsome report on that enquiry. The speed and detail of the attention that the inquiry team paid has been exemplary, and it should give us all hope and confidence that it is a sign of things to come for the victims and survivors who will engage with Sir Anthony and his team.

I do not propose to revisit the Bill's provisions in full detail. The Committee's position and thinking are set out in its report and were rehearsed at Consideration Stage. However, I will briefly note some of the key changes in the Bill, which the Committee welcomes and supports. The Bill and terms of reference for the inquiry have been amended so that the inquiry can investigate abuse that occurred as far back as 1922. It will not now exclude a number of the older victims, a significant and welcome improvement. I thank the Department for agreeing to that amendment. The Bill now provides for changes to the terms of reference to be made by way of an order subject to draft affirmative resolution of the Assembly. This provides an appropriate level of scrutiny by the Assembly and valuable reassurance to victims and their representatives. The change was welcomed by the Committee and by the Human Rights Commission.

The amended terms of reference for the inquiry are a key issue. Although the inquiry is into historical institutional abuse, there may still be lessons to be learned. One point on which the Department did not agree an amendment requested by the Committee was the inclusion in the terms of reference of a specific duty to make recommendations on changes to law, practice and procedure to prevent further abuse. However, most members were satisfied with the Minister's amendment to the terms of reference so that the inquiry, in making its findings and recommendations, will do so:

"Bearing in mind the need to guard against future abuse,"

The Committee sought and welcomed the clarity on the arrangements for publication, which have been inserted at clauses 11, 12 and 13. The Committee also welcomed the Department's reassurance that the inquiry's report would be published once it had been concluded and that Ministers had no intention of delaying publication or withholding parts.

The Department and the inquiry chairperson provided valuable reassurance on how the Bill would operate in a number of situations, one of which was that victims would be consulted about any proposed changes to the terms of reference under the normal principles governing consultation.

The Committee was also reassured to hear that the inquiry chair is agreeing a protocol on how the inquiry will work with the Police Service, where abuse coming to light could give rise to criminal liability or is the subject of police investigation.

Clause 12 provides for the payment of inquiry expenses by OFMDFM. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International raised concerns about the impact of that power on the independence of the inquiry. Specifically, Ministers can give notice to the inquiry chair if they believe that the inquiry is acting outside its terms of reference, in which case OFMDFM will not meet the costs of such activity. The Committee welcomed the Department's assurance that the withdrawal of funds would happen only in the highly unlikely event that the inquiry persisted in activities that were outwith the terms of reference. That reassurance was also welcomed by the Human Rights Commission.

As Chairperson of the Committee, I, once again, thank the victims and survivors and their representatives and all those who made submissions or gave evidence to the Committee during its scrutiny of the Bill. Throughout the process, it became increasingly clear that we had to recognise that it was incomplete, dealing as it does only with victims of institutional abuse. It does not deal with clerical or non-clerical abuse. I am increasingly nervous about using the example of Father Brendan Smyth, because I do not want anybody to think that abuse was perpetrated by only one person. However, the example serves well to say that victim A may have been abused by Brendan Smyth in an institution at twelve o'clock, and victim B may have been abused in his own house at two o'clock, but only victim A has recourse to Sir Anthony Hart and his inquiry. We are all aware of that, and the Committee has yet to form a view on the way forward on those not yet included, but we are committed to discussing this important issue with the Department going forward. We hope to do so in a timely manner and one that is appropriate to the needs of the victims who still seek a forum and a mechanism for redress.

On behalf of the Committee, I finish by wishing Sir Anthony Hart and his team Godspeed for victims and survivors.

Mr Eastwood: I am very glad to say that we have arrived at this legislative stage. I take this opportunity to thank the Ministers and officials for co-operating very well with the Committee and with all the difficult questions and awkwardness that we sometimes presented them with. A number of people have done a lot of work to make sure that the legislation has got to this stage so quickly, and they all need to be thanked. However, I also want to make the point that this day would never have come about if it had not been for the victims and survivors of abuse in this country. Some of them are with us today, and all of us who have listened to them over the months and years know the hurt that they have gone through and the long, hard road that they have had to suffer. They have had to fight to get to this day. Today, they need to be proud of the work that they have done. We only facilitated that very hard work, and I think that they can be proud of what they have achieved.

We have all had discussions and debates at Committee Stage, and we are all happy with what we have arrived at. I had a number of amendments, some of which were accepted and some of which were not, but we have a Bill that is fit for purpose and of which we can be proud. We will have an inquiry that will be able to get to the truth. Hopefully it will be able to provide the answers and eventually the redress that the victims require.

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

We have to say — this has already been alluded to — that a lot of people will not be served by the inquiry. It was right that we did it this way. This was the only way in which we could do it. We had to set up a specific inquiry for institutional abuse, but, in doing that, we need to be mindful of the fact that there are many people who will not be covered by the inquiry. The Chairman used a very obvious and good example of people who will not be served by it. We as a Committee, along with Members and Ministers, agree that we need to move urgently to begin to tackle the issue of clerical abuse. It is Ireland's greatest shame. It was a terrible horror that was inflicted on very many young people and children right across this island,

and we need to do everything in our power to ensure that, on this side of the border, we address that very serious and shameful issue in our past. I hope that we can move as an Assembly to begin to deal with that process. It will not be an easy process; it will be a difficult one. However, with the focus now on the issue, we need to take the opportunity to move the agenda and begin the process of addressing clerical abuse.

We wish Sir Anthony Hart and the members of the inquiry all the very best, and we hope that they can arrive at a situation in which the vast majority of people can be happy with the outcome. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that all victims are aware that it is happening. I know that, sometimes, in our Stormont bubble, we think that everybody understands what goes on up here all of the time. We need to make sure that every victim understands that the inquiry is happening and the acknowledgement forum has begun and that they are offered the opportunity to be involved. Many people in many parts of the world have suffered as a result of historical institutional abuse in Northern Ireland. I hope that everything will be done to ensure that those people are offered an opportunity to come forward.

In conclusion, I thank the Ministers, the Department, everybody involved with the Committee, the people who came to give evidence and, especially, of course, the victims for getting us this far. I wish the inquiry all the very best, and I hope that the victims and survivors can finally get some sort of peace after many years of very difficult suffering. I hope that that will happen sooner, rather than later.

12.45 pm

Mr Lyttle: Obviously, I, too, rise to support the Bill. At its Final Stage, I want to take the opportunity to recognise the hard work of so many people that has gone into assisting us to reach this stage. In particular, the departmental officials and Committee Clerks were exemplary in the manner and timeliness with which they assisted the smooth and prompt passage of Committee Stage. I also pay tribute to the organisations that were involved, in particular the victims and survivors, from whom all of us learned a great deal when hearing their testimonies on this extremely difficult and challenging issue.

The Alliance Party has supported the Bill from the outset of the process. I am pleased that we have such a united voice in the Chamber today in support of the Bill. I repeat the comments that I made at Second Stage, when I put on record the Alliance Party's hope that the Bill would provide an opportunity for the voice of victims and survivors to be heard and that their need would be met after so many years of such unimaginable suffering. I am pleased that, further to the Committee Stage, the time frame of the inquiry was, indeed, widened to allow more victims to have their voice heard and the possibility of closure and redress. I hope that the inquiry's findings or recommendations will be considered in a timely manner and in a way that gives the opportunity for closure or redress to as many victims and survivors as possible.

I am also mindful of the concerns about the victims of clerical abuse. The Alliance Party is eager to see that measures are put in place to meet the needs of those victims. I hope that, now, the Bill can deliver a process and action for the victims and survivors of historical institutional

child abuse, which are long overdue, and will provide proper mechanisms to avoid any future occurrence of such abuse. My party and I support the Bill.

Mr Bell: Can I, again, say a word of thanks to the victims and survivors? It is they who have experienced a level of horror that many of us can only think about, and we try to empathise with them. They came to us. It is their courage, tenacity and campaigning that has brought us to the stage where we have a Bill that will, within minutes, become law. We heard your accounts. We heard accounts of what can only be described as unspeakable torment. We know that, as children, you were placed in a very vulnerable position. We know that you had no one to turn to. We know that the people who should have been there, to whom you should have been able to commit your trust and who were entrusted with your care, we believe, failed you. But can I say this? You came to us and asked us for an inquiry, and we said that we would do our best. The First Minister and deputy First Minister gave an instruction to junior Minister McCann, junior Minister Anderson and me to prioritise this and get the Bill through.

We did that because we, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister understand the violence, brutality and humiliation that were meted out to children in institutions here. Those are the shocking realities that the inquiry is designed to address in order to guard against future abuse. Junior Minister McCann and I understand that victims were robbed of their dignity, self-respect and childhood.

I know that many victims and survivors were keen to see this come to a swift conclusion and an inquiry set up and started. I pay tribute to SAVIA and the many other groups of and individual victims and survivors who have brought us to this stage. I hope that you can look to the fact that, on 31 May, we announced the inquiry's terms of reference in the House; on 12 June, we introduced the Bill; and today, only five months later, the Bill has reached its Final Stage.

As I say, junior Minister McCann, junior Minister Anderson and I had the privilege of working with victims and survivors. It was you who exposed the abuse and demanded an inquiry. So, on behalf of junior Minister McCann, First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness, I take the opportunity today to thank each and every one of those victims and survivors for their contribution, for the difference they have made and for their help in the success of this task in which we have been engaged. Thank you.

The Bill has been drafted, agreed, introduced, scrutinised and amended in just nine months. The work that began last Easter is, I am pleased to say, to become law imminently, before Christmas.

Mr Lyttle, Mr Eastwood and the Committee Chair raised important issues. I want to say that child abuse is child abuse, no matter where it was committed. The reason we are looking at residential abuse is that those children had nowhere else to go and no other caregiver. That is why those specific parameters were set down. However, let me say that the issue of clerical abuse is no less important or emotive than institutional abuse. We are minded of the equally destructive impact that child abuse, clerical abuse or any other form of abuse from any other profession has on individuals. The Executive will have to give careful consideration to how that should be dealt with following the inquiry into historical institutional abuse.

The categories covered by the inquiry were selected because of the particularly vulnerable nature of those in residential care. Setting the parameters in that way does not in any way undermine the trauma that has been inflicted on many other individuals as a result of abuse in domestic and other settings. Anybody has the right to report any form of child abuse that they have suffered in the recent or distant past to the police and social services and to have a full investigation, and I encourage them to do that.

We understand that much will come to light in the inquiry that will be and can be intensely distressing to those who hear about it, read about it and learn of it. It is the Assembly and the Administration's prayer that the needs of victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse will be addressed and that appropriate measures will be taken, as they asked us to do, to ensure the future safety of our children.

I equally pay tribute to the victims and survivors who are not here but suffered. For many reasons they are not here. Those who have gone before — as the victims and survivors referred to them in many meetings — are not here to see this day and this Bill go into law. I hope that tribute will be paid to the work they did over many years to bring us to this point in a testimony to those who are not here to see this day, when an inquiry into the nature of historical institutional abuse will imminently go into law.

As a society, we hope to learn from the inquiry. We genuinely hope that the inquiry will, in the fullness of time, achieve some lasting sense of closure for those who will walk through its doors in the weeks and months that lie ahead. I commend the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill [NIA 7/11-15] do now pass.

Charities Bill: Final Stage

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I beg to move

That the Charities Bill [NIA 11/11-15] do now pass.

I again put on record my thanks to the Chair and members of the Social Development Committee for their timely and effective scrutiny of the Bill. It was important to move the matter on quickly, so I appreciate the efforts of the Committee, particularly given its full programme of scrutiny of other important primary legislation. I am pleased that the Bill has received support from Members across all parties and that the work of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has been widely and favourably recognised.

The primary purpose of the Bill is to amend the public benefit provision of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. This is significant legislation that will enable the commission to consult on its draft public benefit guidance, to publish that guidance and begin the process of registering charities in Northern Ireland. Registration is a core and necessary part of the commission's work. Details of the charity register and the accounting and reporting information that will follow will be important public information. That will give the public and donors confidence in the work that charities do and provide assurance that charities are fit for purpose.

Local charities and their representative bodies have broadly welcomed the Bill and the prospect of regulation. Charities wish to see their valuable work acknowledged and to receive assurance that they are meeting their charitable purpose and providing public benefit. We have around 6,500 charities on what is called the "deemed list", charities that are registered with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs for tax purposes. The Charity Commission has estimated, however, that there may be up to 10,000 groups undertaking charitable activity in Northern Ireland. They will all be required to come forward for registration. It will be a phased process, starting in the autumn of 2013. The commission will work closely with the charitable sector to ensure that organisations have as much support as possible in complying with the legislative requirements.

Today is, undoubtedly, an important step forward in meeting the objective of having a well-regulated and vibrant charities sector in Northern Ireland. As we approach the Christmas period, we are all aware of the pressures faced by local charities in helping those most in need in our local communities. This legislation is about recognising that work and its intrinsic value to making this a better place to live. I commend the Charities Bill to the House.

1.00 pm

Mr Brady (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for moving the Final Stage of the Charities Bill.

In accordance with Standing Order 33(1), the Bill was referred to the Committee for Social Development on completion of its Second Stage on 11 September 2012. The Committee received nine written submissions and took oral evidence from NICVA and the Charity Commission. The Committee heard from the Department on the provisions of and rationale for the Bill. At

Consideration Stage, amendments were proposed, principally a new clause 3 relating to insolvency law. We were content to agree the new clause at that stage.

I will not rehearse what has been said at previous stages, but it is necessary to focus on the key aspect of the Bill and what it will mean for charities here. In short, the Bill corrects a deficiency in the Charities Act 2008, providing clarity on whether an institution is or is not a charity within the meaning of the Act. The legal uncertainty in the Act has meant that the Charity Commission has been unable to fulfil its obligation under the legislation because the public benefit requirement under the 2008 Act was not workable in practice. Therefore, the registration of charities here has been delayed. However, I have previously acknowledged that the Charity Commission has already established a deemed list of some 6,700 charities, on which it has been working closely with HMRC. The commission deserves credit for that.

The Bill clears up the legal uncertainty, which Members and stakeholders will welcome, thus providing the legislative framework so that all charities in the North will be required to prove that they meet one or more of the charitable purposes, are purely charitable and operate for the public benefit. The clarity provided by the amendment to section 3 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 means that the Charity Commission for the North will be able to begin the process of registering charities here. As we look ahead, it is essential that the Charity Commission begins the work of consulting stakeholders on the public benefit requirement and brings its proposals forward as quickly as possible. However, the Committee recognises that that will not happen overnight. The Committee will work with the Charity Commission, the community and voluntary sector and the Department to offer advice and direction as best it can.

In closing, I thank the departmental officials, who have always been ready to assist the Committee in its deliberations, and the Committee staff. I thank colleagues on the Committee for their dedication in scrutinising the Bill, one of three that the Committee has been considering since October. The Committee has always sought to scrutinise legislation and policy in a constructive way, even though, on occasion, it may be contentious. It is fair to say that all Committee members have stakeholders and the wider community at heart when carrying out their scrutiny role. Hopefully, that is reflected not only during the process of scrutiny but in the final outcome. I commend the Bill to the House.

Mr Durkan: It is with great pleasure and great surprise that I welcome the Final Stage of the Charities Bill. For the reasons outlined by the Minister and the Deputy Chair, I support the passage of the Bill.

Mrs Cochrane: I also concur with the remarks of the Minister, the Deputy Chair and fellow members of the Committee who are present. Having spoken in favour of the Bill at various stages, I will not repeat my comments. I support the passage of the Bill.

Mr McCausland: I thank Members for their contributions to the debate. I am grateful for the constructive input of Members in the progress of the Bill at all its stages and, moreover, for the high level of consensus that it has enjoyed.

I am committed to working with the Charity Commission to continue with the full implementation of the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. That will require further subordinate legislation as we move forward with accounting and reporting requirements. I encourage local charities to become fully engaged with the commission's consultation on its draft public benefit guidance. This is an opportunity to ensure that we have detailed guidance that fully reflects the nature of the charitable sector in Northern Ireland. I ask the Assembly to pass the Charities Bill and allow it to move forward to Royal Assent.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, I do not see a quorum.

Notice taken that 10 Members were not present.

House counted, and there being fewer than 10 Members present, the Deputy Speaker ordered the Division Bells to be rung.

Upon 10 Members being present —

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Charities Bill [NIA 11/11-15] do now pass.

Mr Deputy Speaker: 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 sitting was suspended at 1.05 pm.

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

2.00 pm

Executive Committee Business

Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Before we move to Question Time, I wish to inform the House that the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012 received Royal Assent today.

Oral Answers to Questions

Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Economy: North/South Co-operation

1. **Mr Mitchel McLaughlin** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline how her Department is working with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation in the Irish Republic to address factors contributing to low economic growth. (AQO 3077/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Well done to the Member for getting into his place just in time.

My Department works with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation primarily in relation to the North/South body InterTradelreland, which both Departments fund jointly. InterTradelreland is responsible for developing North/South economic co-operation to the mutual benefit of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Biannual meetings on trade and business development take place through the North/South Ministerial Council. My officials from Invest Northern Ireland and the Department meet the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation, and Enterprise Ireland, to develop a common understanding of the challenges facing businesses in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and to identify best practice and to discuss areas of mutual co-operation.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for that answer, in which she came directly to the point. Have any discussions, specifically on the challenges facing the economy in both parts of this island, offered up or compelled closer co-operation between her Department and its counterpart?

Mrs Foster: We have very good relations with Minister Bruton. Indeed, we had a good conversation at the most recent North/South Ministerial Council meeting two weeks ago.

In relation to the challenges in front of us, he kindly offered, in relation to the Irish presidency of the EU, to invite us to issues that arose in which he was involved. We look forward to that engagement. In particular, InterTradelreland has been able to work well in the whole area of government procurement across the border. Indeed, it has worked with a number of firms in Northern

Ireland to try to assist them to gain work in the Republic of Ireland, and I have been pleased with the progress that has been made. We look forward to more progress in that area.

Mr I McCrea: Will the Minister detail why we continue to look to an economy that is going down the tubes rather than trying to do the good work that she is doing in respect of the economy here in Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I understand the Member's question, but the Republic of Ireland is our nearest neighbour and, therefore, we should look at opportunities in that market, which is what we have been doing through the work at InterTrade. I noticed that some people were looking at the jobs created by InterTradelreland. Of course, InterTradelreland is not a jobs creation body; it is a trade body that does exactly what it says on the tin. If jobs are created, that is very good and we welcome that. In fact, we only recently asked InterTrade to monitor the number of jobs that result from some of the programmes that it carried through. We must make sure that there is no duplication, and Invest Northern Ireland will always be the primary jobs creation body in Northern Ireland.

Mr Kinahan: In her discussions with her Irish counterpart, did the Minister pick up on any other factors or actions that we should take on board and put to the Prime Minister to help us with corporation tax?

Mrs Foster: No, because we know of the experience of a lower rate of corporation tax in the Republic of Ireland. It is one of the ways in which it has been able to attract high-profit firms, and that is one of the reasons why we believe that we need to have that competitive disadvantage dealt with through having the right to set the rate here in Northern Ireland. I very much welcome the fact that Her Majesty's Government have decided to lower again the national rate of corporation tax to 21% by 2015. However, we really need to look at the competitive disadvantage that we sit at with the Republic of Ireland in not only attracting inward investment but dealing with our indigenous companies. That is why we firmly believe that we need to set our own rate of corporation tax.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for her answers to the question so far. Would it be possible to get an estimate of the potential opportunities for cross-border co-operation with the Republic of Ireland so that chances to grow our private sector can be created? Indeed, can I go further and ask whether anyone has made any estimation either of the possible upside to that or of what its full potential might be?

Mrs Foster: That is the stock-in-trade of InterTradelreland, and that is what it does day and daily. It has been looking at opportunities for Northern Ireland firms in the Republic of Ireland and, vice versa, at those for Republic of Ireland firms in Northern Ireland. It has held a number of seminars across the whole island, including some in Northern Ireland. We want to see it being more proactive on the ground, particularly where small and medium-sized companies are concerned. For many of those small and medium-sized companies, their first market is their closest, and we very much want to see InterTradelreland working with them.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Question 9 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer. Raymond McCartney is not in his place for question 2; and Sue Ramsey is not in her place for question 3.

Corporation Tax: Joint Ministerial Working Group

4. **Mr D Bradley** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the outcome of the joint ministerial working group on 18 October 2012 with regard to the decision on devolution of corporation tax. (AQO 3080/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The UK Government have a clear ambition to create a competitive corporate tax regime, and, since taking up office, they have reduced the headline rate from 28%. We, too, have prioritised a competitive business environment, and through the joint ministerial working group we have consistently pressed for the devolution of corporation tax powers.

That group's work has now concluded, and good progress has been made on many issues associated with devolving corporation tax. For example, we now know what a devolved corporate tax regime would look like, even though many were initially sceptical that such a system could be developed at all. The report is now with the Prime Minister, and we are seeking a meeting and a further opportunity to press our case. We will again emphasise the need for early decisions so that we can provide clarity and certainty to local businesses and inward investors.

Mr D Bradley: Can the Minister tell us what type of response, either formal or informal, she got from conversations with the Prime Minister when he was last here?

Mrs Foster: As I indicated, I think that his attitude to corporate tax was put forward again in the autumn statement. He believes that a lower rate of corporation tax right across the UK would benefit the UK economy. So, if you asked me what I believe his feeling on a lower rate of corporation tax in Northern Ireland is, I would say that he is probably quite sympathetic to it. However, he will have to take in other considerations, and we all know what those are. I think that we need to press him again and say to him why we believe we need this in our toolbox. I have spoken to the business community recently to tell it that it also needs to press that home to him. We will certainly continue to do that.

Mr Gardiner: Given the uncertainty in the business community, can the Minister give an indication of when a decision on the issue may be forthcoming from the Prime Minister? Is there any action to be taken in the interim period?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. If it were up to me, the decision would be made immediately, but it will, of course, be a matter for the Prime Minister. The joint ministerial working group has completed its work, and the paper was passed to the Prime Minister's office on 16 November, so it is with him now. As I said, the First Minister and the deputy First Minister have sought a meeting with the Prime Minister to push home again the importance of this issue for the Northern Ireland economy. I have said to the business community that I very much hope that it will come in on the back of that, as, indeed, I am sure that it will. As you rightly said, we need to bring clarity and certainty to the issue, and we need to deal with it once and for all, because the continuing uncertainty is very unhelpful.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Is the Minister concerned that the forthcoming Scottish referendum is causing a delay in the decision?

Mrs Foster: The Member quite rightly pointed to the elephant in the room in this whole issue, which is Scottish independence. We have been very clear that we believe that that should not be a factor in devolving corporation tax. That is because we are saying that, as a devolved region, we want to contribute to the Westminster coffers instead of always looking for a subvention from them. Therefore, in actual fact, this is devolution working for the United Kingdom, whereas the Scottish Government of the Scottish National Party want to break away from Westminster. What we want to do is be an integral part of the United Kingdom and make sure that we pay our way, and the way to do that is through the use of corporation tax.

Mr Craig: Will the Minister outline what the possible benefits to Northern Ireland would be of the announced reduction in the corporation tax rate in the autumn statement?

Mrs Foster: The coalition Government, and the Conservative Party in particular, want to have a lower tax regime. They have recognised the use of a lower rate of corporation tax to try to stimulate the economy. As I said, they are going to reduce the rate to 21%, it having been as high as 28% in 2010. I think that the Government are inherently sympathetic to our argument about using a lower rate of corporation tax to try to stimulate the Northern Ireland economy. We now just need to push that case even more with the Prime Minister.

Tourism: GB Visitors

5. **Mrs Overend** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the number of visitors from Great Britain in 2012. (AQO 3081/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Latest estimates indicate that we have welcomed over 650,000 visitors from Great Britain in the first nine months of 2012. The estimates are provisional and will be revised when full end-year figures are available. The GB market is our largest tourist market, and we know that, given the very challenging economic conditions, many GB residents are opting to stay at home. Over the past five years, the overall outbound market from GB has declined by 18.3%. In addition, the UK experienced its second-wettest summer on record since 1912, which encouraged those who are travelling to seek out sunnier climates.

However, I am pleased that the industry sentiment is extremely positive, and it is encouraging to see an increase in occupancy rates across accommodation providers, with room occupancy in hotels increasing by 11% this year to date. By the end of the 2012 cruise season, Belfast will have welcomed 45 cruise ships, bringing over 80,000 passengers and crew, with a further eight ships visiting Londonderry. Titanic Belfast smashed its visitor targets so far this year, with 621,000 people passing through its doors. The new Giant's Causeway visitor centre has already welcomed over 300,000 visitors. The Irish Open was a phenomenal success and the first European Tour event to sell out. Therefore, there is much to celebrate, although we recognise the challenges ahead.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her answer. She will be aware that the number of visitors from GB was down 15%, according to the most recent statistics. It has been most disappointing that we were not able to capitalise more on the Olympics. What does the Minister put that particular issue down to?

Mrs Foster: First, as the Member should know, because she put out a statement at the time, those are provisional estimates, and we do not have the figures for domestic tourism or, indeed, for the tourists that come up from the Republic of Ireland. I am very happy to take the Member's question when I have full tourism statistics.

Work is under way with Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Central Statistics Office in Dublin to improve our surveys and ensure that we have a robust system in place to measure visitor numbers to Northern Ireland. I am now asking my officials to review tourism statistics and how they are communicated so that, when they are communicated, they are not provisional figures but full statistics that we can all talk about with some confidence and some knowledge.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her answers. She will share everyone's disappointment that the figures are down. Although the Minister may try to blame Tourism Ireland, and Tourism Ireland may try to blame the weather, there are a number of factors involved.

Will the Minister agree with me about promoting the island of Ireland as a single tourist destination, where visitors can go to the Ring of Kerry, the Giant's Causeway, the Fermanagh lakelands and the cliffs of Moher in one single trip, instead of trying to promote different markets on one island?

Mrs Foster: The Member needs to look at the markets. We had a piece of work carried out, not just by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board or Tourism Ireland but by Fáilte Ireland and a number of industry providers called the tourism recovery task force. They did a piece of work specifically on the Great Britain market, and what they are essentially saying is that what we have been doing to date is not producing the results that we need to produce. There needs to be a Northern Ireland-specific campaign in Great Britain. That work is not for me but for the tourism recovery task force.

2.15 pm

If the Member wants to look at objective statistics and reports, that is the objective report that he should look at. I am very pleased that the tourism recovery task force has plotted a way forward, which is being taken forward by Tourism Ireland and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. We look forward to monitoring how that campaign works over the coming years.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for her answers so far. I do not disagree with anything that she says. However, given that Ireland and Britain healed the wounds of the past in a very public way last year, does she not agree that we should maximise every opportunity, including "The Gathering", which is forthcoming, to ensure that visitors coming from Britain visit Northern Ireland as well?

Mrs Foster: That is precisely what we will be doing with our campaign for the UK City of Culture. It is a UK City

of Culture, so we are inviting the rest of the UK to come to Northern Ireland to celebrate the very first UK City of Culture. We are having the World Police and Fire Games here for the very first time, and that will be a tremendous celebration.

Members should also remember that the G8 summit is coming to County Fermanagh because we are part of the United Kingdom. It is because we are a part of the United Kingdom that we are able to host the G8 summit.

Business: South Antrim

6. **Ms Brown** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many businesses in the South Antrim constituency have received financial support in 2012. (AQO 3082/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Between 1 January and 31 October 2012, Invest Northern Ireland approved 227 offers of support to 120 different businesses located in the South Antrim parliamentary constituency area.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for her answer. I know that she appreciates just how difficult it is for businesses in the current economic climate. Will she outline what Invest NI's activity levels are like in South Antrim at present?

Mrs Foster: Assistance worth £4.33 million has been offered to 227 projects undertaken by 120 businesses. Those projects plan to invest £15.77 million in the local economy. I am pleased to tell the Member that, in South Antrim, there are currently 24 jobs fund business investment projects at various stages of development, which should lead to the creation of 130 new jobs, 38 of which have already been created.

The jobs fund work continues, sometimes very quietly in the background, across Northern Ireland. I do not have the figures for each constituency with me, but if Members wish to see those figures I will be happy to give them out. The jobs fund does its work, sometimes with very small companies or with small numbers, but, as I have said on many occasions, if each small company was able to take one or two extra people on, we would be able to deal with the issues that are in front of us today.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that supplementary questions should be specifically about South Antrim.

Mr Cree: I appreciate that the Minister's response deals with South Antrim. However, in the wider picture, we could all argue the same sort of thing.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Supplementary questions should be specific to South Antrim.

Mr Cree: Does the Minister have a strategic plan that will encompass South Antrim and the other constituencies to try to identify those most in need? *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Foster: Yes. The Member is well aware of that plan. It is called the economic strategy.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a freagraí go dtí seo. I thank the Minister for her answers up to now. Will she outline proposals for the next round of European regional development fund (ERDF) moneys and how those will assist small businesses in the North?

Mrs Foster: Small businesses remain very much our focus when we look at European funding. I have been particularly pleased with the way in which councils have used ERDF moneys for their local economic development. Indeed, in the East Antrim area, for example, six councils have come together to provide a suite of support which has been achieved through the use of ERDF moneys.

Obviously, we will look at the new programmes once they are available to see where the priorities lie and where we can fit into them. In particular, we want to use the Horizon 2020 research and development fund, and we want more small and medium-sized enterprises to use those funds going forward. We will concentrate very heavily on that.

Telecommunications: Dervock

7. **Mr Storey** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps are being taken to improve the telecoms infrastructure in rural areas such as Dervock in the North Antrim constituency. (AQO 3083/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Building on previous investments of around £45 million over the past four years, which have sought to improve broadband services across Northern Ireland and which included North Antrim, my Department is scoping two projects aimed at further enhancing the region's telecommunications capabilities.

The first of those is aimed at ensuring access to broadband services of at least 2 megabits per second to all premises and superfast broadband services of 24 megabits per second to 90% of premises by 2015. Postcode areas across North Antrim, including Dervock, have been identified as forming part of the intervention area for the project. The second project is aimed at improving access to 3G mobile services across Northern Ireland while preparing a platform for the delivery of 4G mobile services.

Mr Storey: I thank the Minister for her answer. I also thank her for her continued interest in this area of work. I welcome, in particular, the inclusion of Ballintoy in her Department's broadband content initiative, which I trust will yield some valuable outcomes. I also welcome the fact that the exchange in Dervock has now been enabled with the systems that have been introduced.

Will the Minister assure the House that she will continue to emphasise to mobile operators the importance of their ensuring that there is delivery of service? We still have a problem in the village, particularly with mobile access. The service is still not of a standard that is in any way acceptable.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. I have had the opportunity to raise the general issue of mobile coverage with mobile operators. I met them recently to talk about their respective investment plans. On 26 November, I met Vodafone representatives, who wanted to discuss with me their planned upgrades for 2G and 3G networks in a collaborative initiative with O2. Just last week, on 5 December, I met representatives from Everything Everywhere — EE, as it now prefers to be called — to discuss the introduction of 4G networks and future investment plans for Northern Ireland.

We will keep speaking to mobile operators. For us to understand what we can do by way of intervention, we need to know the areas that they will not be able to

accommodate. I told both those operators that I really need to know about their investment plans. That may be difficult for them given that they are commercial companies. However, if we are to step in and help where there are gaps, we need to know where they intend to make investments over the next while. I was encouraged by the meetings with the mobile operators. We will keep speaking to them about what they can deliver across Northern Ireland; that is the key point.

Mr Allister: I will also express the frustration of constituents, particularly in the Dervock and Benvarden areas, where there is woeful mobile coverage. The Minister said that she met the mobile providers. Has she got any comfort from them? I must say that, having written to them all as a public representative, the sort of correspondence that one gets back is quite dismissive of the problem. Has the Minister, with her status, been able to extract anything more comforting and any real promise of progress for people in that area?

Mrs Foster: The mobile operators have been able to share with me maps of their coverage after they had put additional investment in place. They hope to have that investment in place by the start of the first quarter of next year, so it will be in and around April or May. Those maps certainly look very impressive. The Member will probably agree with me when I say that it is unfortunate that we do not have a regional target for Northern Ireland for 2G and 3G. That has always been the difficulty for us. However, I am pleased that we have a regional target set for 4G. That will drive the mobile operators to do more for that service.

I made the point to them that I hope that, if they are upgrading 2G and 3G, they look to their commitments for 4G and put in a proper infrastructure to be able to deliver that as well, because it is coming down the road. As you probably heard on the radio this morning, the spectrum auction for 4G starts today. I very much look forward to the day when we have 4G across Northern Ireland.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. The Minister has stated on a number of occasions in the Chamber that every household and business can access broadband through satellite. Given that that is very expensive in many cases, what efforts is the Minister making to ensure that these alternative technologies are more affordable, particularly for rural people?

Mrs Foster: Again, that is a difficult area, because these are commercial companies, and we intervene and give them a subvention to try to get them to deliver to more rural areas. I am quite happy to meet the Member, listen to his specific concerns about the cost of access and raise them with the companies directly. We fund these companies to deliver satellite services where we cannot provide a fixed fibre service. If they are pricing themselves out of the market, we should have a conversation about that.

Construction: Redundancies

8. **Mr Dickson** asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, given the recent redundancies in the construction sector, what discussions she has had with affected contractors. (AQO 3084/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While I was on a trade mission to China, my officials met a number of Patton Group subcontractors at

Stormont on Monday 12 November 2012. Today, along with Mr McKay, I also had the opportunity to meet a number of the subcontractors affected by the Patton Group going into administration. It is not possible to provide grant assistance to these contractors, but, at short notice, Invest NI organised advisory clinics on 15, 16, 21 and 22 November 2012 and offered more detailed follow-up consultations. Advice and guidance are also available from Invest NI through the business support team and at www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

Mr Dickson: I thank the Minister for her answer. Minister, when will your departmental officials take serious account of the cascade effect from primary redundancies and business closures? It seems very unfair that you cannot deal with subcontractors affected in that way.

Mrs Foster: This very morning, I had a discussion about that with Mr McKay and the representatives of the three subcontractors whom he brought to see me. There is also an onus on the industry, and there was a good discussion today about the fact that subcontractors' interests are not represented by any particular group or body. When times are good, they have a very flexible arrangement with the main contractors. However, when times are bad, there is no protection for them. Is there a gap that the Assembly or an all-party working group on construction needs to look at? I am sure that the matter will be taken up.

I do not accept the Member's comment about not doing anything. We have gone out to individual companies to try to assess their specific difficulties. If there is a good pipeline of work and they are just dealing with cash-flow difficulties, we can intervene with a buying-time loan. That is not a grant; it is a loan that we can put in place.

I am also encouraged by the fact that, last week, representatives of a company called Copious Resources came to see me. The company is based in Glengormley and recruits staff for the offshore energy industry. They told me that construction skills are transferable to the oil, gas and renewables sectors. I await a proposal from the company, and I very much welcome the fact that it came forward.

So there is a lot going on. Sometimes, work goes on in the background, and I welcome the opportunity to clarify that to the House.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I do not anticipate the Minister having a ready answer to this question because it is quite complex. It concerns a subcontractor or supplier being involved with a main contractor who is in financial difficulties, as is the case with the Patton Group. If the main contractor was involved in a major, or maybe not so major, public work scheme and made a commitment to the subcontractor, will the Minister ensure that payment to the subcontractor is fulfilled by another Department? Basically, I am asking the Minister to discuss the issue with other Departments to make sure that, when a main contractor gives a commitment to a subcontractor, who complies and orders materials, payment for those materials is fulfilled.

2.30 pm

Mrs Foster: I am sorry if I am wrong, but I understood that the Finance Minister had brought forward legislation to deal with the very issue of payment to subcontractors. However, if I am wrong about that, I will clarify that. I am

certainly happy to talk to the Finance Minister about those issues because I listened to the subcontractors say today that they do not have any protection, and that is maybe an issue for the all-party working group. I am happy to come along and have that discussion because, when times are good, it is fine and flexible and people can move about and all the rest of it, but, when times are tough, those people do not have any protection under the law. That has been pointed out on many occasions.

Environment

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Questions 5 and 10 have been withdrawn and require written answers.

Planning: Rural Homes

1. **Mr Hazzard** asked the Minister of the Environment whether he has any plans to make it easier for non-farming rural dwellers to secure planning permission to build homes in the countryside. (AQO 3092/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I thank the Member for his question. With planning policy 21 (PPS 21) and other rural interventions, we have been trying to make it easier for farming rural dwellers and non-farming rural dwellers to secure planning permission to build homes in the countryside. I will give you one fact and figure to confirm that: compared with the similar quarter last year, approvals for new single dwellings in the countryside are now up from 83.9% to 88.5%, and for replacement dwellings, from April to June, compared with the same period a year ago, are up from 90.8% to 92%. Those figures confirm that, as PPS 21 beds in, as the operational review is ongoing and as better consistency, better practice and better interpretation of the policy is deployed, there are more and more better results across the Planning Service. That confirms opportunities for farming and non-farming rural dwellers.

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. Can the Minister confirm whether those figures are indeed talking about those on farming criteria? Does he have any idea when he will bring forward the outcomes of the review of PPS 21? Will there be guidelines with such a review?

Mr Attwood: The operational review needs to be understood. I could have done a snapshot operational review and that would have been it. However, I told officials to have a rolling operational review so that, as the review continues — it has been continuing for many months now — you keep the attention on the operation of PPS 21 to ensure that because of peer reviews of planning decisions, because of the design guide published in May 2012, because of the training that was rolled out at this time last year, because of my interventions around planning decisions where I think the policy has not been interpreted consistently with the substance and spirit of the policy, a rolling operational review leads to the consequence of better outcomes for new single and replacing dwellings. In my view, as I continue to deploy that operational review on a rolling basis, you will get more and more better outcomes. There are Members in the Chamber this afternoon who have brought cases to my attention, and I have gone and looked at sites. On the far side of that, consistent with the policy and the proper interpretation of

PPS 21, there have been better outcomes. Yes, I will come to the Chamber very soon with the conclusions of the operational review to date, but I will continue to keep under review the operation of PPS 21.

Mrs Overend: Does the Minister accept that there is a wide range of perception and attitudes to rural housing between the east and the west of Northern Ireland, and to the role of land use generally?

Mr Attwood: That is a fair question, and it would have been an even more accurate question 18 months ago. When I looked at the profile of decisions and recommendations for approval and refusal, there seemed to me to be a disparity. When I spoke to MLAs across parties in this Chamber, there seemed to me to be differential treatment of applications in some areas, especially in the west compared with the east, and in some particular areas of the west. That is why, because of the evidence that was coming to me from planning officials, representatives of the Ulster Farmers' Union and others, I thought that there was a valid point consistent with the sentiment of that question. When you look at the figures and at the application of the policy now compared with then, that perception is less acute, but I would not be continuing with the operational review unless I thought that further interpretation was required to ensure consistency and the proper flexibility of the policy.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagraí. My thanks to the Minister for his responses. I am looking for a general update on the review of PPS 21. The Minister will recall that I met him recently around a number of issues, and I refer specifically to the visual linkage aspect of farm dwellings and the interpretation of infill or gap sites. Can the Minister advise on whether those issues have been incorporated in the review, and what level of cognisance will be taken in the interpretation of policy on those issues?

Mr Attwood: I acknowledge what Mr McGlone and other MLAs in this Chamber and meetings with agents and applicants have revealed. It is only in hard cases, and in the interrogation of hard cases, that the issues identified by Mr McGlone around infill, clustering and applications for buildings, where there might be health and safety issues, and so on, that you can identify where the inconsistency or better interpretation of policy may lie.

In that regard, even in recent weeks, individuals who were brought to me by my colleague Colum Eastwood have given me and the Planning Service further insight about how interpretation should be more consistent or more flexible. One individual gave me three or four examples that are in the image of the examples that Mr McGlone brought to my attention. All those will be captured in the conclusions of the operational review.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I remind Members to make one enquiry on each question.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his answers so far and for his acknowledgement of the right of rural people to have a home in the place they were born and reared. Is the Minister cognisant of the problem that might arise of what is commonly known as the "Donegalisation" of our rural countryside, particularly in this part of the east of the Ulster province?

Mr Attwood: I note what the Member has said. I had reason to write to a former Secretary of State of this place to criticise him for saying in the House of Lords around six months ago that they did not want to have what, in his view, happened in Northern Ireland happening in English rural countryside planning policy.

I wrote to Lord King, formerly Tom King the former Secretary of State of this place, to point out to him that he should have known better, in my view. He should have known better because of the more dispersed rural character of this place compared to Britain, the value that we place on local community identity, the capacity to live locally, and the fact that farming is our single biggest industry and that, consequently, we need to shape planning policy to accommodate in a reasonable way that biggest industry, be it with dwellings or other farm accommodation.

That is why a consultation is ongoing about a permitted development right to allow farmers, subject to appropriate safeguards, to build up to 500 square metres on their land without planning permission. The point of all that is that Lord King was wrong, in my view, to assert that further restrictions should be placed on the character of our rural community. In my view, the consequence of PPS 21 is to reflect the particular character and needs of our rural community. Whether people portray that as "Donegalisation" or not, I am satisfied that that is the right way to go.

Marine Bill: Fishing Industry

2. **Mr Boylan** asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what consultation there has been with the fishing industry regarding the Marine Bill. (AQO 3093/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. I will answer it in three ways. Whether it is the fishing industry or other stakeholders, there has been a very intensive consultation conversation, which I think I escalated 18 months ago, with regard to the Marine Bill. In the future, there will be a further intensive process of consultation with regard to marine planning and marine conservation zone (MCZ) designation, which clearly is a matter that might preoccupy elements of the fishing industry.

During the Environment Committee's consideration of the Bill, the concerns of the fishing industry were clearly captured. I hope the Bill will come to the Floor of the House after an Executive meeting this week. In my view, those concerns will be reflected in the substance of the Bill when it comes back for Consideration Stage and Further Consideration Stage. In that way, due regard has been given to the views of the fishing industry. It may not be that, in all instances, the industry will be fully satisfied, but I think that it has been reasonably accommodated.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. With respect to the designation of MCZs, clearly there is going to be displacement. If there is going to be displacement of activities, how are you going to address that in relation to the fishing industry and any other activities? You will displace them from one area to another. How do you accommodate those people in the industry? In return, how do you protect or conserve the areas that will maybe be affected after the displacement process?

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question; it is a fair one, but I differ with the Member about the premise of the question. The premise is that there will be displacement. In my view, that is not going to happen as the process of designation of MCZs rolls out. In my view, there will be, on the far side of the marine plan and the MCZs, some parts that are of such high value and require such high protection that there may be displacement. However, in my judgement, having looked at this very closely and seen how it will evolve over the next period of time, it will be in a small number of places where, because of the need for very high protection, there may be a consequence of displacement. For example, in Strangford lough, there is a risk that if it were designated as an MCZ, there would be potential displacement because of the no-take zone in the middle of the lough, but, in my view, that will be the exception. As we work through MCZ designation, looking at the science and habitat information and taking into account the views of all, including stakeholders, the consequence of that will be mitigation of displacement, if there is any displacement at all.

Mr Storey: In his answer, the Minister referred to intensive discussions with stakeholders. Will he give an assurance that the concerns that have been raised by residents of Rathlin Island in my constituency will be taken on board, and that protection will be given to the island first and foremost to ensure that islanders do not see intrusion coming as a means of inhibiting what they have done to date? Rather, the Marine Bill should be seen as something of an advantage to them and will benefit what is, in my estimation, one of the most idyllic parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr Attwood: I agree with the Member very much that Rathlin Island is an idyllic part of this part of Ireland and of these islands. Indeed, a year ago, I had a great opportunity to go out with my marine division staff, as they now are, and we went around the back end of the island, where I had never been before, to see where the puffins gather and all of that.

Mr Storey: Did they have wee orange feet?

Mr Attwood: Yes, indeed, there were some of them there. There is no place where you can avoid those wee orange feet, it seems. *[Laughter.]*

2.45 pm

Whether it is the residents of Rathlin Island and their farming interests or farming interests in other places, when the Bill comes back to the Floor of the Chamber and when it comes to assessing marine sites, the standard against which they will be assessed will have to take account of social, cultural and economic impacts. Members of the Committee know full well that, subject to the consent of the Assembly, the legislation will take into account social, cultural and economic impacts. The consequence will be that, without giving an economic veto to any one or other interest, in the body of the Bill and in the application of the Bill, issues around the economic impact — fishing impact, for example — will have to be taken into account. The assessment of MCZs will be so exhaustive that I have no doubt that the issue of economic impact, including the impact on the residents of Rathlin, will be taken into account. It will not give any group of residents a veto over what might happen, but it will give them a more than adequate input into what should happen.

Mr McClarty: I thank the Minister for his answers so far. What plans has he to protect marine conservation zones that are not outlined in the Marine Bill?

Mr Attwood: Marine conservation zones will take some of the current designated areas and reclassify them as MCZs. However, whatever about the designations, whether at sea or on land, the Environment Agency (NIEA), through the deployment of all its responsibilities under European directives, is constantly protecting our seas, land, waters and natural heritage generally. I can give an example of what happened yesterday: when it came to a particular planning application, I had the natural heritage people from NIEA in to interrogate them — I mean interrogate them — on how to protect the habitat of, of all things, the curlew, which is in decline in this part of the world. I can assure you that if I can draw any conclusion from that meeting, it is that there are a lot of custodians of our natural heritage, be that at sea or on land. Therefore, in that way, the Member's question of whether we will protect those MCZs is answered.

Water Framework Directive

3. **Mr Kinahan** asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department will fulfil its requirement to submit a progress report on the implementation of the water framework directive to the European Commission by December 2012. (AQO 3094/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. The answer is yes. We have an obligation to report back to the European Commission by 22 December this year on our progress on implementing the water framework directive. There has been a pattern and a requirement over time to report to the EU on the implementation of the water framework directive. The 2012 report is necessary to give the European Union a snapshot of how we are implementing the water framework directive, which captures a whole family of directives from Europe on urban waste water, nitrates and other issues around water. It will give us an understanding of where we are, and it will mean that we are on the right path to having 59% of our waters at good status by 2015. However, it is quite clear that if 59% of our waters will have good status by 2015, 40% have yet to attain that target.

Mr Kinahan: I thank the Minister for his answer. It is good to know that it is a yes. Given the great success that he had with the heritage crime summit and the good beach summit, will he consider having a freshwater summit to ensure that we are meeting all the water framework directive requirements? The summit could involve all the Departments, agencies, NGOs and all the stakeholders, particularly the fishermen and anglers who are concerned about the status of our rivers.

Mr Attwood: I have an inclination to convene summits because I think that they are a good way of bringing into the room all the relevant interests in government and, more critically, outside government, to interrogate issues, identify actions and take things forward. There may be merit in what you are saying.

In some way, it is already covered, because the beach water summits that we have held look at issues around the nitrates directive and at the NI Water programme of enhancement of sewer works in order to improve our urban waste water quality, further to the relevant EU directive.

Many of the issues that the Member identified are captured by the good beach summit. If there is a need to broaden that conversation, I will certainly not be resistant to so doing.

Ms Lo: Has the Department sufficient resources to meet the target that he just mentioned to fulfil the river management programme?

Mr Attwood: That is a fair question. A little less than two years ago, a bid of close to £9 million was put in to government on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, but led by the Department of the Environment, to take forward work arising from the river basin management plans. We have 26 local management area action plans, but to fulfil the requirements of the water framework directive and to do what we have to do on river restoration, nitrates and urban waste water, it would have been very helpful if, at that time, the Executive had allocated the £9 million to take forward the work. I found the moneys in the Department's budget to take it forward, but it is a struggle. That is why I recently wrote to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to see whether further money could be identified to surpass the ambition of 59% of good water status by 2015 and to achieve good water status in the further EU accountability periods over the next 10 and 15 years. Good work has been done, but more money is needed to do more work. That is why I am in correspondence with ministerial colleagues.

Mr Dallat: I thank the Minister for his answers. I am sure that he will agree that Members need to have a smile back on their face again. Will you please assure us that the trends and performance of our water quality are on target to meet all the requirements of the European Union and that we will not incur infractions?

Mr Attwood: I would love to answer those questions with a compelling yes, but I think that I will be more precautionary. It is clear that the direction of travel around some of our directive requirements is encouraging. It should be no less than that, given the investment in our farms to improve compliance with the nitrates directive, for example. Yes, there is a positive and encouraging direction of travel around nitrates, urban waste water and our European obligations. I cannot make that claim across the range of directive responsibilities. There are good examples of good progress, and there are other examples where a lot more progress is needed. However, compared with other countries that are in serious breach of EU directives, such as Spain, Portugal and Belgium, we are in a better place, but it is clear that there will be a need to escalate what we are doing to meet the more challenging accountability requirements, including the more challenging water quality requirements that are to hit us in 2016.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his answers so far. Can he assure me that, in the absence of the plastic bag levy, he has the money to fully fund the implementation of the water directive?

Mr Attwood: The carrier bag levy is not a revenue generator. It is, first and foremost, and must remain first and foremost, an environmental intervention to do here what has happened in Wales and in the Republic of

Ireland, which is to reduce the use of plastic bags by 90%, except that we, of course, are going to go further than that. We are going to try to reduce the use of single-use bags — plastic, paper or other — and will try to capture in forthcoming legislation cheap reusable bags, because they can be an equal threat to the environment. So, I am not relying on this money to fund the functions of the Department. I am relying on the policy to fund the functions of good environmental management.

Councillors: Severance Scheme

4. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of the Environment when he will be in a position to bring forward further proposals and information on the councillors severance scheme. (AQO 3095/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I thank the Member for his question. It is necessary, given that I am about to talk about the proper treatment of councillors of long service, to acknowledge councillors of more recent service who have been subjected to threat and terror over the past number of days. In fact, there may even have been further developments in the past number of hours.

A consultation will be released before Christmas in order to consult with the Assembly and more broadly about what the final proposals might be in respect of the councillors severance scheme. I have not resiled from the principle of a councillors severance scheme. I have asked my Executive colleagues to fund that scheme in full because I think that there is a political responsibility to acknowledge all those people, who, especially in very difficult days, stood up for democracy. I think that the events of the past days confirm that conviction.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply and I associate myself with the remarks that he made on the service that councillors do, particularly in the past days. Will the Minister tell the House whether he has produced detailed costings yet for the reform of local government? How much does he believe he will receive from the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP)? This is vital to ensure that ratepayers do not bear the brunt of an absurd and politically motivated reform.

Mr Attwood: I note the last comment and will say nothing in particular in reply. The conversation that I have with my Executive colleagues is the conversation that I have with council colleagues, and it is the conversation that I have with my officials and officials in local government, and it is this: it is not sustainable to argue that the funding of local government reform should fall to local councils exclusively. It is also not sustainable to assert that councils should make no contribution to the funding of local council reform. So, how do you reconcile those assertions?

First, in my view, government has to make a significant upfront contribution over the 30 months to costs associated with council reform, around which there will be no long-term savings. That is why I have submitted a number of papers to the Executive and have had conversations with DFP in order to crack that issue. I have asked that this matter be tabled under the three meetings rule at the Executive meeting on Thursday. In my view, a very substantial, upfront contribution has to be made from the Executive.

Secondly, in my view, and there is broad agreement about this, soft loans should be made available to councils to help them to fund council reform going forward. The interest for those soft loans, whatever scale they might be, should be paid by central government not by local government.

Thirdly, councils have a contribution to make themselves. I have said with increasing rigour — there is the man himself who has to give me all that money on Thursday — that, for example, when it comes to sharing collaboration, councils have to escalate their efforts to share more and collaborate more.

On 'Good Morning Ireland' —

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: Your time has run out, Minister.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a fhreagra. Is the Minister of the view that the councillors severance scheme might be better timed to await the final recommendations of the Boundary Commission on the district electoral areas (DEAs)?

3.00 pm

Mr Attwood: The point is whether one can tell councillors to take severance in the absence, on the one hand, of the final shape of local government boundaries, and, as some would also argue — I have less sympathy with this — in the absence of a remuneration panel, which is to be appointed for future council allowances, making its recommendations. Therefore, there is a point behind that. I would like to think that the former point might be dealt with in the consultation that issues before Christmas.

Executive Committee Business

General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I beg to move

That the draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

The order that comes under the consideration of Members is intended to provide revised fees relating to certificates and marriage and civil partnership preliminaries and formalities that are charged by the General Register Office (GRO). It will also introduce fees for new services that are included in the Civil Registration Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012. The proposed date for the commencement of the fees is 17 December 2012. The most recent fees order was made in 2010. This order proposes new fees to reflect the increase in costs of providing those public services.

Members will wish to note that, under current law, fees are not charged for the statutory requirement of registering births and deaths or for providing one copy of a birth entry at the time of registration. However, fees are chargeable for the provision of other certificates and for further certified copies of registration events, including, when necessary, the searching of indexes and the retrieval of the record involved.

There are also chargeable fees for the carrying out of procedures such as recording a name change and for marriage and civil partnership services, including the giving of notice, solemnisation of marriages and the registration of civil partnerships. Under government accounting rules, the cost of such chargeable services is recovered by means of a fees order, as provided for in the relevant legislation. It is in that context that this order comes before the Assembly. The General Register Office and district registrars' offices provide in excess of 150,000 certified copies of vital events each year for which fees are chargeable.

The production of certificates requires significant administrative input that involves receiving moneys; searching indexes; producing copies on security paper; certification; and dispatch. GRO efficiency in those processes has improved over the past few years with the completion of the digitisation project, which digitised all paper-based registration records from 1845 to date. The availability of digitised records has improved the service with regard to speed, the accuracy of data that is provided and the quality of documents. The introduction of enhanced indexes provides more information than previously for members of staff and the public, which results in a more efficient service.

Over the years, the General Register Office has significantly improved options for the delivery of registration services by the introduction of new services. The public can order certificates from any location in the world, either over the internet or by telephone, and pay for those services using their credit cards. That service has developed further with the introduction of the Civil Registration Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, which enabled the Civil Registration Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 to be brought forward to introduce a number of new

services. Those services will include the introduction of a short death certificate that will exclude the cause of death; the introduction of commemorative certificates for memorable life events; the sharing of registration information with other Departments; the ability to have registration events that occurred abroad recorded in the records in Northern Ireland; and greater access to historic civil registration records to facilitate genealogical enquiry.

As I said, the General Register Office is required to recover the cost of chargeable services, including those provided by local register offices based in each district council. The last fees order was introduced in 2010, and further increases are now necessary. The cost of each fee has been calculated individually, using work-study analysis, to reflect the work involved in each area and includes the full range of costs involved, including staff, rent, rates and computer maintenance in GRO and district registration offices.

A similar cost recovery system operates in Scotland, England and Wales. The passage of the order will ensure that, as has been the case here and in GB, the cost of providing services and producing chargeable certificates is borne by the parties requiring such services and not by the public purse, as would otherwise be the case.

Members will wish to note that, at the new levels, fees in Northern Ireland for certificates issued by the General Register Office are similar to corresponding fees for certificates issued in Scotland. Although the fees for certificates in England and Wales are lower than those in Northern Ireland, there is no reduction in England and Wales for additional copies of the same certificate, which are often required. In addition, certificate processing times in Northern Ireland are shorter than in other parts of the UK, which results in the public receiving a speedier service.

The order has been considered by the Committee for Finance and Personnel, and no objections have been raised. I, therefore, commend the order to the Assembly.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. As the Minister explained, the General Register Office (Fees) Order 2012 sets the fees to recover the costs of various services connected with the registration of vital events, such as births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships.

The Committee considered the proposal to make the order and sought clarification on how the increase in fees for cost recovery had been calculated. The Department advised us that, in accordance with government financial guidelines, the General Register Office is required to review fees annually to ensure that the cost of providing chargeable public services is recovered. These fees are calculated to recoup costs without making profit. Costs are calculated to reflect the amount of work involved in each area and can include costs such as staff, rent, rates and IT support.

Departmental officials stated that, although there has been an increase in the cost of certificates, some fees have remained unchanged. However, an increase of £2 has been applied to statutory certificates, the cost of which has not increased since 2008 — four years ago. The latest fees review indicated that full cost recovery was not being achieved and that an increase was required.

The Committee also noted that the cost of statutory certificates, or marriage and civil partnership fees, are calculated in a similar way to certificate fees when all the processes and costs involved are taken into consideration. The Department assures the Committee that the fees are based on the length of time that it takes registration staff to carry out the marriage or civil partnership functions.

The introduction of fees for new services such as the notification of life events was noted as being based on costs. In the case of events in the record of NI Connections, fees are based on anticipated usage and set-up costs.

Having received that clarification, the Committee agreed to support the Department in seeking the Assembly's endorsement of the order's provisions.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the measure and believe that the increases are commensurate with what is necessary.

Mr Wilson: I wish that they were all as easy as this. We have set a new record.

First, I thank the two Members who took part. The fact that there has not been a great deal of comment obviously indicates that the Committee did its job well when speaking to officials about the reason for the fees increases and how those increases are calculated. The Chairman made a very important point: we do not seek to profit from this; we simply seek to recover the costs of providing the service.

It is important that we also look at how we can keep those costs down. It is not a case of simply letting the costs go through the roof and then getting the public to pay for it. We have sought to keep costs down in a number of ways, whether through digitisation of records, which makes searching for records speedier and more efficient; looking at how we can reduce staff as a result of the use of technology; and keeping a record of demand by each district council office, thereby ensuring that only staff who are necessary are employed.

The fees increase is reasonable. I thank the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee, and the Committee, for their support. I commend the order to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill: Legislative Consent Motion

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): I beg to move

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 20 June 2012, dealing with company directors should be considered by the United Kingdom Parliament.

We are here to consider an important issue arising from the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill, which was presented to Parliament on 20 June 2012. The memorandum was laid before the Assembly on Monday 24 September 2012. The matter is being brought before the Assembly because company law is a transferred matter under the terms of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 but is legislated for on a UK-wide basis.

The Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill is a private Member's Bill sponsored by Gavin Barwell MP. Its passage through Parliament is being supported by the UK Government. The main purpose of the Bill is to repeal various pieces of legislation that discriminate against the participation of those with mental health conditions in public life.

The Government are committed to improving life for people with mental health problems. The current law concerning company directors is out of date. It sends out the wrong message that if you have a mental health problem then your contribution to public life is not valid. The Bill is part of the Government's commitment to improving life for people with mental health conditions, and tackling prejudice and discrimination. It is supported by the Royal College of Psychiatrists as well as by mental health charities such as MIND and Rethink Mental Illness.

The main objectives of the Bill are threefold: the repeal of the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983 that dictate that the seat of a Member of Parliament who is detained under mental health legislation for more than six months must be vacated; amendment of the Juries Act 1974; and revocation of parts of the Companies (Model Articles) Regulations 2008, which require that a person should cease to be a director of a company due to reasons associated with mental health.

The provisions under consideration today, which fall within the remit of my Department, are those that remove the requirement in the Companies (Model Articles) Regulations 2008 that a company director's appointment should automatically terminate if his or her rights or powers have been restricted by a court order on mental health grounds. My Department has been advised that such regulations have the potential to act as a discriminatory barrier against people suffering from mental health conditions.

Under the terms of the Companies Act 2006, companies must have a register and articles of association. If they do not have their own articles, then article 20 of the Companies Act 2006 dictates that model articles of association under the Companies (Model Articles) Regulations 2008 apply by default. It is those model articles to which the proposed changes will be made. Revocation of those measures will remove the potential for discrimination and ensure that the regulatory balance

continues to exist between Northern Ireland and GB company law.

If the opportunity to avail ourselves of the provisions in this Bill is missed, the existing uniformity of the United Kingdom company law regime could be affected. A legislative gap could be created, thus exposing local businesses to the inefficiencies that differing legal codes could create and preventing company directors in Northern Ireland from benefiting from the modernisation of company law in the Bill.

3.15 pm

Termination of directorships on grounds of incapacity will still be allowed under the amended regulations. The model articles already provide that someone ceases to be a company director if a registered medical practitioner who is treating them gives the company a written opinion that they have become physically or mentally incapable and will remain so for more than three months.

As I said, if the opportunity to avail of the provisions in the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill is missed, the existing legal uniformity of the UK company law regime could be affected. I am sure that the House would not want that to be the case. Maintaining legislative parity helps to ensure consistency and, indeed, reduce uncertainty. Therefore, I urge Members to support the legislative consent motion (LCM) and, in doing so, ensure that Northern Ireland remains in step with other devolved Administrations in delivering improved equality of opportunities for our communities.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle, Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as ucht an rún seo a thabhairt os ár gcomhair. I thank the Minister for bringing the LCM before us today.

The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment welcomes the LCM on the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill. On 27 August, the Minister wrote to inform the Committee of the Department's intention to seek an LCM to enable the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to legislate to revoke those parts of the Companies (Model Articles) Regulations 2008 that require that a person should cease to be a director of a company when, by reason of that person's mental health, a court order is made preventing the person from exercising some or all of their powers and rights, or on the written opinion of a medical practitioner that the person will not be capable of acting as a company director for three months or more.

The Department informed the Committee that the relevant provisions of the UK Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill will amend the Companies Act 2006 and, hence, company law as it applies in Northern Ireland.

At its meeting on 4 October 2012, the Committee received oral evidence on the LCM from departmental officials. The Committee is content that the Bill proposes the removal of the potential for a discriminatory barrier to people with mental illness and the consideration of reasonable adjustments. Having considered the evidence, the Committee agreed to support the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) in seeking the Assembly's agreement to the UK Parliament considering provisions of the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill dealing with devolved matters to remove the

requirement that a company director's appointment should automatically terminate if his or her rights or powers have been restricted by a court order or mental health grounds. Therefore, the Committee is quite happy to support the Department and the Minister in her proposal.

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: I call Mr Dominic Bradley.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Príomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I must say, you have taken me unawares. All I can say is that I agree with the Member who spoke previously.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Committee Chairman and, indeed, his colleague for supporting him. The Bill will assist Northern Ireland companies, allowing them to operate without discrimination or prejudice. It will, I hope, provide encouragement for businesses to operate in an environment in which people with mental health issues are not discriminated against but actually encouraged to play a full and valuable role. Passing the motion will help to secure those benefits and demonstrate how the Assembly is committed to helping local businesses. I thank the Members of the Committee for their consideration and thank the members of the Executive. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No. 2) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 20 June 2012, dealing with company directors should be considered by the United Kingdom Parliament.

Private Members' Business

Banks: Interest Rate Swap Agreements

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

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I beg to move

That this Assembly notes with concern the fact that local banks may have mis-sold interest rate swap agreements to local small and medium-sized businesses; further notes the campaign by Bully-Banks.co.uk to highlight this issue and support businesses that have been directly affected; calls on banks to adequately compensate local businesses that have suffered; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to engage with the banks to ensure that customers who have been affected by this are treated fairly.

I bring the motion to the House in response to this issue after learning of it from one of my constituents. I am aware that a number of MLAs are not aware of the issue. Small businesses were unaware of the complicated nature of the product when it was presented to them in the way it was by the respective banks. The genesis of this is from the culture of the time that preceded the recession, when the banks had clearly lost the run of themselves and did not act in a responsible way. They were acting to meet targets, and those targets came before the customer. That is, quite clearly, the case here. It has had a devastating impact on hotels, B&Bs, restaurants and small manufacturers.

This issue has been discussed at length across the water in Westminster. From anecdotal evidence, it is quite clear that it is a big issue for people here. We need to act on it and learn how big an impact it is having on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses in particular. We need to exert whatever pressure we can on the banks to compensate those businesses. Small businesses have certainly been taken advantage of by the banks when it has come to interest rate swap agreements (IRSAs). They approached the customers initially in quite an aggressive way. It was totally inappropriate for those complex financial products to be sold to small and medium-sized enterprises.

Like I said, this came to my attention through a constituent. Like a number of other businesspeople, that constituent is a customer of a bank. He is still a customer of the same bank, and he is reluctant to reveal his identity or put his head above the parapet for fear of how the bank may respond. In a lot of situations in which the IRSAs were signed up to, the customer was under a great degree of pressure in seeking and getting further financial assistance.

The organisation Bully-Banks, which was set up in response to this issue, found that members who were joining the group had nearly the exact same story and step-by-step process about how the banks got them to sign up to the products. The banks quite deliberately and consciously conducted a process of mis-selling. That requires some explanation. The Financial Services

Authority (FSA) has given a guide to the products. The guide states:

"The purpose of an interest rate hedging product is to enable the customer to manage fluctuations in interest rates. These products are typically separate to a loan."

It states that there are four broad categories:

"Swaps; which enable customers to 'fix' their interest rate. ... Caps; which place a limit on any interest rate rises. ... Collars; which enable customers to limit interest rate fluctuations to within a simple range. ... Structured collars; which enable customers to limit interest rate fluctuations to within a specified range, but involves arrangements where, if the reference interest rate falls below the bottom of the range, the interest rate payable by the customer may increase above the bottom of the range."

Furthermore, it states:

"An interest rate swap is a separate contract to the underlying loan agreement. It is an agreement between two parties whereby one type of interest payment is swapped for another; such as exchanging a fixed interest rate payment for a floating payment."

In practice, if the floating interest rate payment increases because base rates rise, the customer receives an amount that they can use to off-set the increase in loan repayments. Conversely, if the floating interest rate payment decreases as a result of falling base rates, the customer makes an additional payment to the bank under the terms of the swap, but benefits from lower loan repayments. The customer's costs therefore effectively remain stable."

That is an overview from the FSA.

Some of these banks created sales teams, and those sales teams were trained to sell the swaps. Each was given a sales target, and those targets were cascaded into branches and their managers. Their first step was to identify who they would sell these particular derivative products to. It is quite clear that they identified the owners of small and medium-sized businesses, who are referred to as "financially unsophisticated" customers. That is not to be derogatory in any way; that was the term used to highlight the fact that this product was in no way suitable for those businesses, particularly when they were not given the correct information or an appropriate overview of the risks involved.

They then identified the moment of sale as that moment when the customer is under a particular amount of pressure, and that was the moment when the small-business owner requested finance for either new facilities or the extension of existing facilities. It is obvious why: the small business depends on the bank for finance. Most of the businesses were sold the swap facility when the bank agreed, in principle, to give finance. That, of course, is the time when the small and medium-sized enterprise is most vulnerable.

In a lot of these cases, the relationship manager advises the customer that the bank thinks that interest rates will go up. That causes the businessperson to worry and to seek some sort of protection against it. The manager would then say that a variety of instruments are available to enable

you to fix your borrowing costs, and 96% of the members of Bully-Banks said that the manager introduced the idea of interest rate fixing and that they had no prior knowledge of it or any desire to seek it. They are then introduced by the relationship manager to an expert from the bank's derivatives department for advice and guidance. I think that this is a great breach of trust as well, because a lot of the customers were sold these products in the context of having built a relationship with their bank manager or whoever they dealt with in the bank over a number of years. Of course they invested a great degree of trust in those institutions, and it is a great shame that they were taken advantage of.

Earlier this year, the FSA drew up a pilot scheme to offer redress to companies affected. However, that has come in for criticism from the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), as businesses have very little detail regarding what is happening. In the meantime, businesses have to pay out while they wait, which is totally unacceptable. The FSA found a range of poor sales practices that included poor disclosure of exit costs; failure to ascertain the customer's understanding of the risk associated with these products; non-advised sales straying into advice; over-hedging; and rewards and incentives being a driver of these practices.

The latest development that I am aware of is that the Federation of Small Businesses and Bully-Banks are due to meet the FSA this week to discuss this issue further. A number of banks locally are affected by this and have been put under the FSA focus, including RBS, Ulster Bank, AIB, Bank of Ireland, Northern Bank and Santander.

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

I realise that I am limited in time, but today we seek support from the House for the motion and to generate some awareness about this, because a number of small businesses that signed into these products do not realise that they were perhaps duped by particular banks. We need to ensure that we, as Members, are made aware of the sort of impact that this has had on the local economy, and particularly on indigenous SMEs. We do not have direct power or great influence over the banks but we have some. Over the past couple of years, we have increasingly had meetings or Committee evidence sessions with the banks, and obviously the Minister has met and tried to influence them as well.

I think that we need to do exactly the same in this case.

3.30 pm

To conclude, the SMEs have been taken advantage of. Such derivatives should not have been offered to them in the way in which they were in the first place. In many instances, there has been —

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

Mr McKay: — a breach of the trust that the SMEs place in their relationship manager and in their banks. There is a duty on us to act and to look at the issue that the motion addresses as the start of that programme of work.

Mr Girvan: I thank the Members who tabled the motion for doing so. Like the Member who spoke previously, I do not have a lot of knowledge of the issue. I am aware that banks have a commercial identity and that they wish to make as

much money as they can. However, they came up with an inventive way of scaremongering.

I understand that this process has been in place since 2001. Banks have forced a number of people who have perhaps been, for want of a better term, suffering from cash-flow problems to be sold the idea that if they take the approach that the process offers, they will at least have a programme and a way forward that they can manage. Unfortunately, the argument about the interest rates that was being put forward in 2001 means that the people who went into the scheme early are still paying an interest rate that is higher than one that they could negotiate now, even through an overdraft, never mind a loan ad. As a result, the arrangements have had a very big impact on small to medium-sized businesses.

I appreciate that banks may want to call these agreements "products", but the problem has been selling them to and targeting them at those who were calling on the banks to help them through cash-flow situations. What some people were using as a working overdraft has been converted into agreements that are now being called "interest rate swap arrangements". However, they are slightly more than that, because the people involved are signing an agreement with the bank. As has been said, the exit fees that some individuals and small businesses have to pay can be very prohibitive.

I am not saying that the product was mis-sold on every occasion; it did and does suit a number of businesses. However, the concern is for those businesses that feel that it was mis-sold. I appreciate that the FSA has a key role to play in the matter, but the Federation of Small Businesses said that it is not overly happy with the regulation that the FSA introduced on the arrangements. I feel that, as far as selling the product to businesses is concerned, those whom it was felt could be tied in for the longest term possible were definitely targeted so that as much money as possible could be screwed out of them.

As soon as I saw the motion in the Order Paper last week, I said, "What on earth is an interest rate swap arrangement?" Therefore, not having a great knowledge of the subject, I took the opportunity to contact one gentleman in business about the matter. He said that he has a small business that was running with an overdraft that increased as he went through the year but that it was always cleared around Christmas because he had a very good Christmas trade that did that for him. The bank came to him during the middle of the year and told him that it could reorganise that situation for him. He entered into one of these interest rate swap arrangements and, unfortunately, he has had to pay quite a hefty sum as a result of the interest rate being locked in for a number of years. That has caused him some difficulty, although it did not put him out of business. However, I can tell you that businesses are saying that they can borrow at a lower interest rate than they did previously and that they are looking for the opportunity to get out of these arrangements. Unfortunately, however, that is not being offered to them.

It is welcome that a number of the local Northern Ireland banks have voluntarily entered into a scheme with the FSA to investigate this matter. It is up to the business to actually request that that investigation takes place. It really falls to the business owner to investigate whether they can get some compensation from those schemes. I appreciate that

there is an agreement for some form of compensation if it can be identified that it was mis-sold.

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

Mr Girvan: The pressure that was applied in the selling seems to be a key issue in relation to those who had targets to meet and bonuses to make.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. When reading up on the background to the interest rate swap agreements, I was struck by the similarity between the way in which they were sold and the way in which PPI was sold. There are similarities. In many cases, the owners of small and medium-sized enterprises were placed under duress by the banks and lenders. In some cases, the implication was that if the borrowers did not enter into a swap agreement to cover possible interest rate rises, the loan would not be forthcoming. The small or medium-sized enterprise owner quite often depended on their bank for working capital, loans and overdraft facilities.

The swap arrangements are extremely complicated financial products, and the borrowers entering into such arrangements would have needed quite sophisticated financial advice to understand exactly what they were letting themselves in for. They did not receive that advice and, quite often under duress, they entered into positions that they ill understood. Bully-Banks, the advocate for the beleaguered borrowers, described those swap arrangements as gambles on interest rates, with the banks acting as the bookies. The only problem was that the borrowers were never told that they were gambling with their own money and possibly gambling with the future of their businesses. They thought that they had bought some form of insurance against interest rate fluctuations, only to find that they were paying through the mouth with no added advantage.

I have read about the way in which those products were sold, and it shows very clearly that everything was stacked against the borrower, with the bank having the leverage of either granting or refusing a loan. The whole process of sale was tantamount to entrapment for the borrowers, with them being left wide open for loss, while the lenders' risks were secured, both in respect of the loan and of the swap arrangements. If the original loan was secured, the bank's risk was well protected without the need for additional protection. The swap arrangements were indeed money-spinners for the banks and were pushed on people who were in a vulnerable position by people who masqueraded as advisers when, in fact, they were salesmen working to increase their own commission and the banks' profits.

I have studied the 14-point plan produced by Bully-Banks in its paper 'The Case Against the Banks — The Mis-selling of Interest Rate Swap Agreements', and I agree with most of the proposals contained in that plan. I am interested to hear from the Minister what he can do here to establish the extent of that issue and what practical influence we can bring to bear on the banks to help ensure that the situation is addressed and rectified on a fair and equitable basis. I have no doubt that the Committee for Finance and Personnel will do all in its power to help address the issue.

Mrs Cochrane: I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion. In the run-up to Christmas, when the financial toll of the festive season can have a significant impact on all in our society, it is important that we try to focus on

economic issues, not least on our small and medium-sized enterprises on which the motion is centred.

I welcome the motion and the work that was undertaken by Bully-Banks, which so aptly lends itself to this debate. There is a need for a measured analysis of the extent of interest rate swap agreement mis-selling in Northern Ireland.

In the motion, the proposers raise the concern:

"local banks may have mis-sold interest rate swap agreements to local small and medium-sized businesses".

Although the statistics for and evidence of mis-selling in practice across the UK is well documented, we should be careful about pointing the finger at any local bank without having the full details from the FSA's findings. A large number of banks that operate across Northern Ireland and GB are cited by the Bully-Banks survey as having mis-sold these products, but, conversely, at least one prominent local bank — Northern Bank Ltd — has been found not to have sold any such products to its customer base.

Other Members mentioned the UK-wide report that was published by Bully-Banks, and that provides an unnerving depiction of IRSA mis-selling over the past decade by a variety of banks. In each instance, there appears to have been a concerted and deliberate effort on the part of the banks to take advantage of the prevailing economic uncertainty to maximise profit margins.

As we heard, in the face of an increasingly competitive and cut-throat financial system, banks have set about creating new products and services to sell to existing customers, interest rate swap agreements being one such product. These IRSAs were subsequently marketed to small and medium-sized enterprise owners by many high street banks, often on a conditional basis and in most instances as an incidental when granting new or extending existing loan facilities.

That reality is reinforced by the statistics that have been mentioned and which show that 85% of customers were sold an IRSA in connection with their loan facilities. Perhaps more startling than that exploitation, however, is the way in which customers, who rely on banks for guidance and support all the more deeply during such fraught economic times, were advised and managed in relation to this mis-selling.

Other Members gave some startling figures on the advice that was given to SMEs, with the majority of customers perhaps wrongly assuming that this advice would be in their best interests. Instead, structured and targeted advice was provided in an effort to encourage customers to enter into various forms of IRSAs. What remains evident in all this is the seemingly unethical tactics that were employed by banks to sell their products aggressively and their manipulation of customers through the advice that they offered.

I have stressed the need for a measured analysis of the extent of the mis-selling in Northern Ireland. When this information becomes available, we would, of course, ask that banks adequately compensate local businesses that have suffered. It is important to state our case to the Minister of Finance and Personnel so that he may engage with the banks further to ensure fair treatment for those

customers who have been affected. However, as banking is not a devolved matter, I assume that Westminster will ultimately decide how the issue is addressed.

I welcome the motion because it does much to highlight a worrying practice in an equally worrying financial climate. I commend the Members responsible for bringing attention to such a critical issue. The Alliance Party supports the motion, the awareness it raises and the engagement that it seeks.

Ms Fearon: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome the opportunity to table this motion along with my party colleagues. Although it is a reserved matter, it is important that we highlight the seriousness of the issue in the Assembly. I welcome what appears to be support across the House for the motion, which is encouraging.

We can take this opportunity today to show solidarity with small businesses across the North that have been affected by this scandal. I recognise that although the products were mis-sold, that was not always the case and that some were sold to businesses that required them.

It is vital that banks are held to account for their actions, and it is essential that we do what we can to avoid such future abuse of our SMEs, which are the backbone of our economy. We have witnessed irresponsible and predatory behaviour by banks towards the SME sector. Interest rate swap agreements were sold, or rather mis-sold, in many cases in an aggressive manner to small businesses that are now paying heavily for that. Many who were mis-sold interest rate swaps either did not understand them or were forced to buy them as part of loans. I know personally of one small firm that was affected.

3.45 pm

The issue has been investigated by the Financial Services Authority in Britain. In June, a motion on the matter received widespread support from MPs who debated it. It was hoped that the outcome of the FSA review would be that the assistance that SMEs needed and deserved would be provided to them. However, although the review accepted that these products were mis-sold, and an agreement was made with the banks on how to progress, unsurprisingly, the banks failed to deliver. It is yet another banking failure and another failure on the part of the FSA.

I must acknowledge, though, the good work done by those involved in the Bully-Banks campaign. It is a clear testament to how widespread the issue is. I accept Mrs Cochrane's point that we need a measured response to know exactly the extent of the issue in the North.

Local small and medium-sized businesses that have fallen victim to this scandal wondered what their options were. Quite often, when complaints were made to the Financial Ombudsman, they were not taken seriously, which left legal advice as one of the few remaining options. However, the outcome of that cannot be guaranteed. It ensures only that further costs are incurred by the businesses. Local small and medium-sized businesses do not usually have the required legal resources at their disposal to go down that path.

It is important to note that even after being exploited and locked into these unnecessary product agreements, a sense of fear still resides among local small businesses.

Many were concerned about speaking out for fear of damaging their reputation and putting their own banking facilities at risk. Many small businesses rely on banks for financial assistance, further credit arrangements and, ironically, advice.

Small businesses already face tough economic times. It does not take much to see the extent of that, with one in five shops vacant across the North. It has to be recognised, though, that positive steps have been taken by the Executive to assist businesses. Just two weeks ago, we discussed the extension of the rate relief scheme. That is just one example of the good work taken forward in that regard.

It is clear, however, that banks have failed to adequately compensate affected businesses and that that has had detrimental knock-on effects. The exit fees have effectively crippled some businesses' finances, thus hindering any prospects for expansion. Banks have put themselves first and their clients second. As already mentioned, we are limited in what we can do here. However, it is vital that the Minister does what he can to engage with banks to ensure that those genuinely affected are given adequate compensation and assistance. I support the motion.

Mr McCallister: I apologise to the House for not being here for all of the debate. I had an important constituency issue to attend to.

Although we do not have direct control over this issue — it is very much an issue for the Financial Services Authority — it is important that we at least have this debate to highlight it. It is important that Members have a chance to make the points that are important to the companies and businesses affected. I am sure that the Minister, too, will tell us about the work that he has been involved in to highlight the issue to the FSA. It is important that there is genuine support across the House for ensuring that we do as much as we can to ensure restitution to the businesses affected. We must make sure that we work towards a resolution so that the issue is not allowed to continue.

The Ulster Unionists support today's motion.

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I thank all Members who took part in the debate. It is an important issue that has clearly affected a number of businesses in Northern Ireland. Nearly all Members who spoke gave examples of businesses affected in their constituency.

First, I recognise the importance of a healthy banking industry in which people in Northern Ireland can have confidence. The economy cannot work without an effective banking industry that people can put their trust in. One of the reasons why this is an important debate is that it is important that the banking industry quickly deals with the issues that arise from this particular matter, simply to ensure that trust.

Secondly, I have meetings with the banks on a regular basis to discuss a whole range of issues. At Question Time and during other debates in the Assembly, I outline some of the discussions that I have with them. The Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister and I are having a round of meetings with the banks to discuss a range of issues, and we will continue with that, because that constant engagement with individual banks and with the British Banking Association is important for the economy.

Turning to the particular issue in the motion, a number of Members have already indicated that they understand that it is a reserved matter. It is not devolved to Northern Ireland, and, therefore, the responsibility really lies with the Financial Services Authority. So, the role for this Assembly is limited. The proposer of the motion indicated that one of the reasons why he wanted to raise the issue in the Assembly was that, first of all, it had been drawn to his attention. Members are quite right to use the Floor of the Assembly to bring attention to issues that are relevant to their constituents. Secondly, he wanted to raise awareness of the issue. Mr Bradley and Mr Girvan made the same point, saying that debates like this could raise awareness.

Can I give an assurance on this issue, Mr Deputy Speaker? The role of raising awareness of this issue does not need to rest with this Assembly. If the requirements of the Financial Services Authority are properly carried out, it is the role of the banks to make their customers aware of this. The instructions from the Financial Services Authority are, first of all, for the banks to review the particular selling of this product. As the Chairman of the Committee pointed out, where businesses were deemed to be non-sophisticated — in other words, too small or without the expertise in the business to appreciate what they were being sold, whether it was appropriate for them, etc — the banks were to contact each one of them to ask whether they wanted their case to be reviewed.

Samples were redone — I cannot remember the exact number, but it was somewhere in the briefing I was given. I think there were to be 10 sample cases, looking at the kinds of things that Members have talked about. Was the product mis-sold? Was undue pressure brought? Were all the details not given to the business? Sometimes, the products were totally inappropriate. The insurance, or the "hedge" as it was called, was sometimes longer than the loan itself. That was a bit like paying for insurance for your motor car, and you still keep on paying for it even after you have got rid of the car. The point was to look at those kinds of issues. Then, of course, the bank would ask the customer whether they wanted their case to be reviewed.

As some Members have said, some customers were afraid about the impact this would have on them as a customer of the bank. Would the bank have it in for them now that they had raised the whole issue? Even when they sat down with the bank, would they have the necessary expertise to deal with it, and everything else? The independent reviewer, of course, could sit in on that meeting. So, awareness should not be an issue. However, again, I point out that of course the Floor of this Assembly should be used to raise these kinds of things that are of general concern. However, it is not absolutely necessary for this debate to be the catalyst for making businesses aware that there is some opportunity to have their cases looked at and to ascertain whether there needs to be any redress.

Judith Cochrane made this point: let us not run away with the idea that everyone who bought that kind of service was mis-sold it. Indeed, the arrangements are still being sold by the banks even today. There will be occasions when it is absolutely appropriate for a business, when taking on a loan, to say, "I do not know what the future will hold, but I want to safeguard myself against the cost of any big increases in interest and, therefore, I want some protection from it." However, it is important that if a customer enters into that arrangement, they are not pressurised and they

understand the full details of the product, what they are getting into and that if they want out early, the penalties that might be involved. They should also have some advice on how appropriate that is in their circumstances.

I will finish on this point. Members have asked what we, as the Department, and I, as Minister, can do. The Department is not involved in this, and the Executive do not have responsibility for it. The Financial Services Authority has responsibility for it.

Local banks came into it late. They volunteered to come into it and were not coerced into doing so, and they came into it on the basis that there was not an assumption that mis-selling had taken place. Nevertheless, because local banks came in late, there is an element of catching up to be done.

The first thing that I will undertake to do is to ensure that in my meetings with local banks, I press on them that, first, as was the case with the banks that were initially brought into this by the FSA, they have an obligation to make sure that they do not drag their heels and that they catch up as quickly as possible with all the arrangements that have to be put in place for notifying customers, reviewing the cases and looking for redress.

Secondly, I will make the FSA aware of today's debate in the Assembly, of the concerns raised by Members, and of the need to make sure that the FSA, which is the responsible authority, ensures that banks do not drag their heels and that, where it is deemed important, proper redress is made, whether that involves doing away with the arrangements and not requiring people to pay for the arrangements any longer or giving them financial compensation.

Thirdly, it will be important for Members to get feedback on the actions that have been taken in cases in Northern Ireland. Apart from anything else, it will show the effectiveness of the arrangements that have been put in place. From our point of view and that of the Members who took the time to stay here until 4.00 pm to listen to me on a Tuesday afternoon because they are interested in this issue, we should have some result from today's debate.

I thank all Members for the way in which the debate has been conducted. It is a complex issue but one that was important to discuss.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank all contributors to the debate and the Minister for his interesting response. Members will appreciate, if this is not a devolved matter, that our Ministers have nevertheless sought opportunities to impress on the banks a more responsible approach and one that maybe takes local economic factors into account.

4.00 pm

The investigation that the Financial Services Authority is engaged in on this matter and the work that has been done by the Bully-Banks organisation have identified that, in the UK, 28,000 small and medium-sized businesses have been affected. Pro rata, that could mean that anything between 500 and 700 of our small businesses have been affected, and it may even be more. Daithí alluded to an invidious set of circumstances where someone goes into a bank and negotiates a loan and the bank then opens up a second discussion about how it can provide protection

against interest fluctuations. It can be very difficult to say to the person who you are hoping will give you a loan that you will go somewhere else to look for that protection. If that were investigated, we might find ourselves in an interesting situation.

I, too, came on to this through my constituency service with a client who had negotiated a loan for £770,000.

Mr Wilson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Of course, yes.

Mr Wilson: It is just on that point, and I know a number of Members raised it. One thing that there did not appear to be a great deal of evidence for was the pressure once people decided that they were going to take a loan. There is a question over whether they were given the full facts, but there does not appear to be great evidence that people were pressurised into this.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thanks very much, Minister, and I want to come back to that point because we should explore the realities, even in the context of this not being a devolved matter.

I was making a point about a client who had negotiated a loan for £770,000. With the interest rate dropping, this person went back to the bank, which he had been dealing with for some considerable years, and he has a number of business interests. He was told that it would cost him £100,000 to buy out of the scheme, and this eventually culminated in a dispute between him and the bank, with which he had had a fairly sensible arrangement for many years. Eventually, it cost him £119,000 to get out of the arrangement. He also found that his other businesses were drawn into the argument. His facilities were reviewed.

That should be of concern to the Assembly. What started off as a loan to facilitate one small business operation then put a number of other successful businesses in jeopardy because of the disagreement or the cost factor involved in protecting that loan. The bank raised the question of sending in an administrator. We are dealing with some aggression here, and, at the very least, an impersonal kind of response from the banks when people raise concerns.

That really brings us back to what we can do. The Minister and other contributors acknowledged that this is not a devolved matter, but the Assembly cannot be disinterested about it. It is an unusual enough arrangement that an issue be dealt with by a joint Committee here, and that shows the seriousness with which it is was taken by the Assembly. The Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Committee for Finance and Personnel have met the banks on a number of issues over the years. That, in conjunction with the work that the Minister has done and which I applaud, is a demonstration that we can attempt to influence the situation beneficially.

If we were to consider convening that joint Committee again, and, maybe, Minister, working with you and your colleague in the Enterprise Department and meeting with the Federation of Small Businesses, we could start to quantify the problem, that is, raise awareness of it. If there is a chill factor and if people are feeling intimidated or concerned about how a bank might respond if they were to flag up concerns, maybe we can develop a case file that can then be passed on to the FSA to show what the circumstances are.

The FSA started off with the intention of investigating four banks. That was expanded when seven more voluntarily joined, so that is 11 banks. I will not name the bank now just to score a point, but the parent bank of that local bank is involved in that investigation, and the local bank is not contributing or co-operating. That is something that, at the local level, we could address. I suggest that we consider, through the Committee Chairs, and with you, Mr Wilson, and your colleague Arlene Foster, how we can compile a case that can be passed on to the FSA to give the small and medium-sized business sector here some reassurance. The powers may not be devolved, but we are not powerless, and we will do our best to influence the situation in SMEs' interests.

I thank all the Members who spoke for their support, and I particularly want to recognise the ongoing work that the Minister has been doing.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly notes with concern the fact that local banks may have mis-sold interest rate swap agreements to local small and medium-sized businesses; further notes the campaign by Bully-Banks.co.uk to highlight this issue and support businesses that have been directly affected; calls on banks to adequately compensate local businesses that have suffered; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to engage with the banks to ensure that customers who have been affected by this are treated fairly.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Suicide: Moyle

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes. The Minister will have 10 minutes to respond and all other Members who are called to speak on this occasion will have up to eight minutes.

Mr McKay: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. This is the last debate of the year, and I start by wishing all Members a very happy and safe Christmas and new year.

I recently visited a group in my constituency called Surviving Our Loss After Suicide (SOLAS). It is in the process of setting up a facility to service the needs of the community in Moyle. It is always good to see such services being set up, especially in the community and voluntary sector. You have to realise the amount of work that is invested in those groups. People give of their time for no financial benefit whatsoever; rather, they do so in response to the needs of their community. That is something that we need to recognise and support, especially financially.

SOLAS was set up in response to the rising suicide rate in the district of Moyle, in particular over a four- or five-year period when there was a significant spike in the number of suicides. In 2006, for example, the number of suicides in Moyle per 100,000 people was 24.2, compared with an average of 16.7. In 2007, it was 24, as against an average of 13.8; in 2008, it was 23.7, as against an average of 15.9; and, in 2009, it was 23.7, as against an average of 14.5. Therefore, the number of suicides there was significantly higher than the average rate of suicide across the North. Indeed, out of the 26 districts, it was the third highest, coming behind only Belfast and Strabane.

In 2010, the year after the rate per 100,000 people was at 23.7, the group was set up, and it has since delivered education and training and hosted a series of public talks on mental and emotional health. Its primary focus has been on health and well-being and it has provided accredited suicide-awareness and prevention training. That approach is very holistic. It creates a sense of community and encourages longer-term involvement. It helps to reduce any individual sense of stigma and overcomes any reluctance to engage. It assists individual capacity-building and limits dropout rates, with a consequential positive and sustainable impact on community health.

Of course, Moyle is very much a small rural community. It is a smallish district by population size when compared with that of the North. It is to be welcomed that the suicide figures have reduced in the past two years, but we cannot be complacent. We need to look at the service provision there and at what we are doing right and then build on it. We need to ensure that there is more awareness of suicide so that people might be able to spot the telltale signs. In particular, what many find in rural and farming communities is a reluctance among many males in

particular to open up and discuss their problems. I am sure that the Ulster Unionist Member is aware of that as well.

We need to address and change that culture so that we can reduce the occurrences of suicide.

I believe that the voluntary organisations that deal with suicide and assist in maintaining people's mental health need all the help that they can get from the Assembly, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS), and any other sources of finance. I received training in suicide awareness from the Public Initiative for the Prevention of Suicide and Self-harm (PIPS) in Belfast a number of years ago, and, from a personal perspective, I thought that it was excellent. It gave me a greater awareness and understanding of suicide, and it enabled me to identify the telltale signs, including the fact that, when people talk about taking their own life, you always have to take that seriously and act on it. That training and that body of work needs to be rolled out across the North, particularly to our young people, as that is key to changing the culture.

Of course, we have to consider the present economic situation. As we discussed today, a lot of businesses and a lot of people are under stress and cannot see a way out of their situations, which could be related to social or business situations. Ultimately, that puts enormous pressure on their mental health. Therefore, the services that organisations such as SOLAS provide are all the more important.

We have seen a startling rise in the number of suicides across the North over the past 20 years. In 1991, the number of suicides was 148. It more than doubled in 2010 to 313, and that is quite alarming. The services provided in Moyle, whether through SOLAS, the suicide prevention development officers who also carry out good work, the Northern Trust and others, are all important. However, we need to ensure that they get all the support that they need and that they receive adequate support from the Department of Health in particular.

SOLAS plays a key role in that. It is a relatively young organisation, but it is making an impact in Ballycastle and the wider Moyle area and is still growing and developing. I know that there are other services related to suicide prevention that it wants to establish, but it is not in a position to do that yet. It will need support from public agencies to be in a position to do that in the near future, and I sincerely hope that it gets the support to do that. It is also tying in with the Hope Centre in Ballymena, which other Members will be aware of. The Hope Centre has a particular focus on drugs, a problem that is intertwined with the mental health issue.

It is important that relationships are built up between organisations and that there is that degree of flexibility. Ballycastle and the Moyle area are pretty much cut off from the rest of the North, and it is important that we have imaginative solutions to service provision in that area.

I thank the House for giving me the opportunity to discuss this issue. I recognise the fact that the Minister has put a particular focus on the issue of suicide. However, we need to ensure that, in rural areas such as Moyle, where we have seen a significant spike in the rate of suicide in recent years, support is given to organisations such as SOLAS. That support needs to be sustainable and it should guarantee that that service, which is at the heart

of Moyle and Ballycastle, is built on and supported in the years to come.

4.15 pm

Mr Swann: I thank the Member for North Antrim for securing this important Adjournment debate.

Members have had a bad press recently because so few have attended some debates in the House. I want to send out a message to the representatives of SOLAS, who I think are in the Gallery, and to the people of Ballycastle that this is no reflection on their work or on the seriousness with which we take the issue. It is important that we can use the Adjournment debate facility to raise important and specific constituency issues such as this.

Daithí has already recognised that Moyle has the third-highest suicide rate in Northern Ireland per hundred thousand of population. That is taken on a five-year rolling average between 2006 and 2010. It is a sad statistic. We can quote other statistics, and I know that they have been quoted. Northern Ireland had the highest suicide rate, compared with Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, in 2010. There were 128 registered suicides in Northern Ireland in 1992, and that rose to 313 in 2010, which was an increase of 145%.

Those are the statistics and numbers that are often used in information packs and debates such as this. However, when we talk about suicide, we have to realise that each one of those figures is an individual. It is a family; it is a wider community; it is a church group; it is a young farmers' group; it is every group and individual that that person affected during his or her life. This place, and we as MLAs, have to support, and should be supporting, the work of SOLAS and other organisations as they take forward their important work.

SOLAS was established in 2010. The way in which it measured the suicide rate was a barometer of poor emotional health, and that is what challenged SOLAS. So far, it has delivered education and training and promoted good mental and emotional health. To date, SOLAS has run yoga sessions, SOLAS walks and exercise boot camps, and it has accredited its volunteers into the training and advice that has been mentioned. We have to acknowledge that: they are all volunteers.

My party colleague Councillor Sandra Hunter, the chairman of Moyle District Council, has paid particular interest and has been very supportive of the group. Wayne Soutter is also looking to do a bit of fundraising for SOLAS. He was the first man to swim from the Mull of Kintyre to Kenbane Head in Ballycastle. That was quite a challenge. With that sort of support behind it, SOLAS will hopefully be able to raise its profile and much-needed funding. As I said, the people involved are doing it completely voluntarily.

As a fledgling group, SOLAS has shown a mature approach to what it is doing, because it has looked for the partnership, for instance, of the Hope Centre in Ballymena in my North Antrim constituency, which I recently visited. A good friend of mine, Joe Boyd, is a director of the Hope Centre. When we consider the work that it is doing in comparison with and in conjunction with what SOLAS intends to do, we see that changes in the funding arrangements for voluntary organisations are having a dramatic effect on their provision.

Earlier, we talked about changes in economic welfare and the upcoming changes to social welfare. They will put a greater stress on the most vulnerable in society. That is where the provision and support mechanisms of SOLAS and the Hope Centre are able to support the vulnerable in the community and their families. They need support, before and after, as well.

We spoke about other backup organisations and the service provision that is needed. We spoke about the suicide prevention officers in the Northern Health and Social Care Trust and the contribution of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to addressing rural poverty. It is about getting that joined-up approach — we often talk about that here — so that we can deliver and support the most vulnerable in society. It is about the wee touches by voluntary organisations such as SOLAS and Good Morning Ballycastle. That phone call in the morning can often make a difference to one person's life. As they sit there, they realise that somebody out there cares and is listening to them.

Before coming to this place, I was director of an organisation called Rural Support, which was set up at the time of foot-and-mouth disease, specifically to provide signposting for farmers who felt that they were under increased financial and mental stress. I worked through cases brought in by the volunteers, and it made me aware of the stresses, strains and hardships facing individuals and families at the time. Usually, they were the individuals and families below the surface, people whom you do not notice in everyday life. A farmer stands in a corner of the market yard, laughing and joking, but, inside, he is really hurting and struggling with what he has to deal with every day. He then takes that stress back to his family, who know what is happening, and there are pressures at home as well.

I will finish by thanking the Member for securing this Adjournment debate. I thank the Minister for attending and listening and for the support that he has given, and I thank Members for coming into the Chamber. I pay tribute to the volunteers and organisations who give up their time to try to make a difference in people's lives.

Mr McDevitt: It is a great honour to be able to join colleagues from North Antrim for this debate. The SDLP is temporarily absent from the House in a representative capacity for that constituency, but I am sure that we will put that right in the fullness of time.

I thank Mr McKay for securing a debate on suicide. No matter what government do or how hard government work, it would never quite be enough. However, what is notable about the past decade here in Northern Ireland is the number of local groups and initiatives that emerged from the communities most affected by suicide. Notable, too, is the power of those groups to identify at-risk individuals, to put support frameworks in place and to be a visible and present bulwark against the conditions that lead people to want to take their life. From what I have heard this evening, SOLAS seems to be such a group. It is a group rooted firmly in its community, with a deep commitment to its community, to community safety and to the protection of its members from self-harm and, obviously, suicide.

It is always worth remembering that suicide is the last link in a chain of failures. When you look at any case of suicide, the failures are often not just by the state, by the family, by the individual or by society. The failures are complex

and often involve many people just not stepping up to the mark when they should have. It is very difficult to live with such a failure, and practically everyone in the House, given the jobs that we do, has been touched at some point by an encounter that caused us to reflect because, months later, we hear of an individual making a bad decision and possibly taking his or her life.

I join Mr McKay in acknowledging the support that several NGOs provide to us through training and capacity building. Their support means that we are at least better able to deal with issues such as suicide and slightly more able to identify very vulnerable people when they come into contact with us.

It seems right, in a debate on suicide, to talk a little bit about some of the practical obstacles that still exist at government level. One that remains important to me concerns coronial services, specifically the coroner's role and the determination of death by suicide. I know that the Minister feels quite strongly about that, and I welcome his commitment. However, I hope that he will take the opportunity, in his response to the debate, to update the House on any progress being made on trying to iron out the issue because settling the cause of death can be a complicated and difficult period for the surviving members of a family.

Another really important issue is that of moving all those groups that sprung up all over the region in the past decade from being voluntary groups, which have the best of intentions at heart and bid for basic funding to be able to get through the week and the year, into groups that actually have the capacity to do a bit more and to move to the next level and to think about how we can tap into the social capital that is out there. Again, when you read 'Transforming Your Care', you see a great opportunity to tap into that social capital and to be able to provide groups that are active at community level with the ability to be involved more formally in the provision of health and social care services in the future. So many groups that are involved in suicide awareness and protecting people from self-harm are great candidates for that. Undoubtedly, however, there is quite a bit of work to do to be able to identify individuals in those groups who might wish to take on a more structured and professional role, and then to ensure that the support and resources are available for them to be able to fulfil that role in the future.

Essentially, those were the points that I wanted to make. It really is a pleasure to come to the House for an Adjournment debate. I am never surprised that so many Adjournment debates deal with health issues. It reminds us just how important the NHS and all the social care infrastructure around its edges, provided by the state and voluntary organisations, are to people. I simply thank the House for giving me the opportunity to participate.

Mr Storey: I apologise to the Member who brought the Adjournment topic to the House for not being present at the commencement of his contribution. I thank him for tabling the debate this evening.

When we come to this issue, it is a solemn and sad reminder to us all that life is a small, thin thread. Regrettably, in the media this week, there was the very public example of the death of the lady who worked in the hospital in London. It is a sad reminder to us that we are dealing with something that is immense in its impact and

devastating to a family and to those who are associated with that family. With great sympathy and understanding, as the previous Member to speak mentioned, we can all give examples from our own experience of people who have seen no other way but to end their lives in that manner. It is coming up to Christmas now. Christmas Day two years ago was probably one of the most solemn that I have spent. A young man from the village of Dervock tragically took his own life. He was buried in my constituency, in the Moyle District Council area. His name was Billy. It reminds us all of the family and circumstances that were so affected by that particular tragedy.

I was somewhat alarmed to see that the comparators show Moyle to have the third highest rate in Northern Ireland, behind only Strabane and the Belfast City Council area. We wait to hear what the Minister has to say about the work that has been done or is ongoing to try to ensure that we do not just read statistics. Over the past 20 years, the suicide rate in Northern Ireland has risen. That is of great concern to us all. When you come to a specific local area, such as Moyle or North Antrim, you need to ask what we are doing to ensure that we access those who are near to or would contemplate taking their own lives. That is why the work of SOLAS and a variety of other organisations is so important.

4.30 pm

I also think of the work carried out in our schools through pastoral care, and as the Chair of the Education Committee, I speak with some degree of insight and, I trust, interest. I think of the example of the postbox system used in Ballycastle High School, which is a very good process for identifying young people with particular problems and issues, which, if unaddressed and ignored, would ultimately lead to their taking their life.

We need to ensure that this is an issue not just for the Health Minister, who, I am glad, is with us this evening. I do not say this because, politically, it is about sharing the responsibility or blame; what we need to have in Northern Ireland is an assurance that our Departments, whoever the Minister is or whatever political party has responsibility for a Department, are working collectively to ensure that whatever the strategy is, it is implemented in the most effective way to deliver the right outcome. That is why I thank the Minister for his support for suicide prevention, including the £6.7 million for the suicide prevention fund, £2.2 million of which goes to the work of the community and voluntary sector.

It is easy for us to come to the House and give such figures. However, as my colleague the Member for North Antrim said, behind all those figures are real people and real lives. In Ballymena, in the southern part of the North Antrim constituency, we know all too well the devastating impact of suicide on young people of school age. That was a very trying and difficult time for us all a few years ago.

We come to the House this evening with a sense of humility. This issue is very serious and needs to be dealt with in a sensitive way. It needs to be debated, and I welcome the fact that very early in the new Assembly term, on Suicide Prevention Day, Mr Rogers from South Down tabled a motion that got the support of the House. So, the issue is not being ignored.

Going back to the local scenario, the work carried out by Moyle community safety partnership is to be welcomed. I think that more needs to be done on a local basis. That is why it is important that the Minister listens to people in areas where there are particular needs. Through the work of the trusts, the voluntary and community agencies, the council and public representatives, we continue to ensure that those statistics are not repeated and are, in fact, reduced; that we have proper means and methods in place to address the concerns; and that, as the Member for South Belfast said, the last link in the chain of failure is broken.

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): First, I apologise for not being here at the outset of Mr McKay's speech. I have had a very busy and trying day. I thank the Member for proposing this topic for the Adjournment debate. I have been impressed by the valuable contributions this afternoon, and I hope to respond to some of the issues raised.

Despite my Department investing £32 million in suicide prevention over the past six years, suicide in Northern Ireland remains stubbornly high, at around 300 deaths per annum. The expert view is that, had we not made that investment, we would be in a considerably worse place, so I welcome the fact that we did make that investment because it is essential. We need to be wise about how we use that investment to ensure that we get the best value for money and it is most effective in reducing the number of suicides in Northern Ireland each year. The investment supports a range of evidence-based interventions to prevent suicide. I have no doubt that lives have been saved. The situation would have been worse had we not done that.

Suicide is a complex issue and has many influencing factors. Although front line services to help people who are in emotional distress or are actively suicidal remain vital, significant inroads into our high suicide rate will be made only when we successfully address the social factors that contribute to suicide. That means addressing social deprivation, ensuring that every child has the best possible start in life, reducing substance and alcohol misuse and violence, improving community cohesion and enhancing the psychological resilience of those in vulnerable groups.

Suicide rates are generally highest in urban areas, especially in deprived urban areas, but rural areas face specific challenges as well, including social isolation, difficulty in accessing services, growing emigration and increasing deprivation as a result of the recession. Many people in rural communities coming from an agricultural background face difficulties that others do not face through unexpected incidents on their farms. There are a lot of financial pressures and troubles and burdens that they do not wish to share with others, which can often end up with people making that wrong decision that suicide is the only way out.

It is also generally acknowledged that the stigma associated with mental illness remains stronger in rural communities than urban communities. Between 2005 and 2009, 18 deaths due to suicide or undetermined intent were registered in the Moyle area. That is a high number of deaths for an area with a population of just 17,000. That meant that, over that period, Moyle had the highest average annual suicide rate of any local government district in Northern Ireland.

Suicide statistics are derived from the General Register Office death registration system. Suspected suicides are referred to the coroner and take time to be investigated. On average, it is up to two years after the suicide has occurred that it is registered. That means that most of the suicides registered between 2005 and 2009 for the Moyle area occurred between 2003 and 2007. For most of that period, we did not have a suicide prevention strategy to inform the response to the situation in Moyle. I have no doubt that that response could have been better.

Fortunately, the situation in Moyle seems to be improving, though one suicide is one too many. Annual average suicide rates for a more recent period are now available. The Moyle rate for 2009 to 2011 is now below the Northern Ireland average; it is fourteenth highest in suicide rates by local government district. I should clarify that that measure is per 100,000 of population and not by Moyle just as a council area, so it is genuinely fourteenth highest. The welcome reduction in suicide in Moyle appears to be continuing in the current year, but these things are hard to assess.

The Public Health Agency is charged with implementing the Protect Life suicide prevention strategy. The refreshed strategy, published in June, contains actions aimed specifically at rural dwellers. They focus on providing access to community-based physical and mental health checks, including signposting to advice services on mental health-related issues. The Public Health Agency has been providing health checks at farmers' markets and has been working with the Agriculture Department to deliver the maximising access in rural areas project, which aims to improve the health and well-being of rural dwellers by increasing access to services, grants and benefits for vulnerable households.

I have frequently said that the approach to suicide prevention must be rooted in partnership working, which Mr McDevitt mentioned, and maximising community involvement. That is exactly the approach that the Public Health Agency has been taking in the wider Northern Trust area, which of course covers the Moyle District Council area. The agency has established a partnership with community groups and networks to help communities promote mental health and prevent suicide. It funds a number of suicide prevention posts to support that work. One post holder works with the North Antrim Community Network to build the capacity of local groups to be involved in suicide prevention and tackling drug and alcohol misuse. The Public Health Agency has assisted community groups in Moyle to apply successfully for funding from the agency's suicide prevention small grants scheme.

That approach has recently been independently evaluated. I launched the evaluation report at an event in Greenmount College in October. The results were very positive. The evaluation stressed that the community network approach in the Northern Trust area has brought suicide prevention and mental health awareness into the heart of local communities and to some of the most marginalised people. It has also enhanced the capacity of communities to deal with the issues. The partnership approach developed by the Public Health Agency and the community networks in the Northern Trust area is clearly helping to deliver real change and improved outcomes in local communities. Local communities are best placed to know the issues facing their people and the resources that are available,

or that need to be enhanced, to deal with them. The community network model, with support from specialist suicide prevention officers and access to relevant funding, will continue to be the model for suicide prevention in the Northern Trust area.

We will continue to keep a watchful eye on all of this. We will continue to work with groups. There are opportunities to extend the work that we are doing with the volunteer groups, groups that are so keen to ensure that others do not suffer as they have suffered. To help ensure that that is the case, we are keen to work with those groups to ensure that we harness their skills and desires correctly and that the support that they give can make a real and meaningful difference. We need to keep driving down suicide rates in Northern Ireland. Thankfully, a dip was indicated last year, after there having been a constant rise for five or six years. We really need to work to ensure that that continues to be the case. I do not know what has happened this year. We hear reports of suicide and about pockets of suicide, but we will not know for a time whether those represent an actual increase or not. Nonetheless, we really need to focus on working with those people who are so keen to help us deliver for our communities.

I attended the funeral of a 10-year-old boy today. Last night, I visited the Spence family. I know the impact that death has on people. Sometimes, people can see no other solution for themselves but suicide. However, the hurt and the harm and the pain for those left behind by that separation from someone whom they loved so much is a very, very cruel thing to deal with, with so many unanswered questions. We need to do so much to get to those people before they take their own life. We need to let them know that they are a valued partner in their home and family and a valued member of our community. We need to let them know that people do care for them and that there are lots of better options out there than suicide. We need to get that message out very clearly. I thank all who help to get that message out.

Adjourned at 4.44 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 January 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Executive Committee Business

Superannuation Bill: Royal Assent

Mr Speaker: Before we proceed to today's business, I inform the House that the Superannuation Bill has received Royal Assent. The Superannuation Act (Northern Ireland) 2013 became law on 9 January 2013.

Matter of the Day

Street Disorder and Challenge to the Democratic Process

Mr Speaker: The Rt Hon Peter Robinson has sought leave to make a statement on the ongoing street disorder and challenge to the democratic process, which fulfils the criteria set out in Standing Order 24. Members other than Mr Robinson must indicate clearly that they wish to be called by rising in their place and continuing to do so. We still have some Members who have a problem with rising in their place when asked to do so.

I remind the House of my ruling that matters of the day should not be used for political point scoring. I ask Members to bear in mind the dignity of the Chamber in the contribution that they might make to the House this afternoon. I will take no points of order until the matter is concluded. All Members called will have up to three minutes in which to speak on the subject matter.

Mr P Robinson: I am grateful for the opportunity. It is important that the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland take an opportunity to speak about issues that, I suspect, are being spoken about in every workplace around the country. It is our duty, as politicians, to support the rule of law and the primacy of the democratic process in this part of the United Kingdom.

The past weekend once again saw protest turn to violence and disorder on our streets. The police have been attacked, protesters have been attacked and local communities have been attacked. No one wins from such conflict, but the people of Northern Ireland as a whole are suffering.

The anger over the spark that started the fire has long since been obscured by the outrage over the violence that has followed. I know that we in the House are not agreed on the issue of flying the flag — I hope that, at some stage, people will be — but I will say it once again: the decision by Belfast City Council to take down the Union flag was, in my view, a mistake. The timing of it merely aggravated a bad situation. It was unnecessary and wrong, and the settled status quo should not have been disturbed, but nothing can justify the violence that has been seen on the streets of Northern Ireland in recent weeks. I ask those who are involved what they think they have achieved. Northern Ireland's international reputation has been damaged, potential investors and tourists will be deterred, our local businesses have been crippled at a time when they needed a boost, scores of police officers have been injured and many of the young people involved in the

violence will emerge from these disturbances with nothing to show for it but a criminal record.

I defend anyone's right to legitimate, lawful and peaceful protest, but in recent weeks far too many have become marred by violence. The cause of the Union flag has been damaged and not helped. The issue will never be solved on the streets, but only through democratic means. You do not respect a Union flag if you use it as a weapon to charge against someone. You are not showing respect for the Union flag if you need to wear a mask when carrying it. For many, the issue of the flying of the Union flag at Belfast City Council is now a cynical cover for their real political agenda, which is to destroy the political process that has been followed in Northern Ireland and which everyone in the House, I believe, stands for. They will not succeed. Although those who sit in the House have very different views on many subjects, we have one thing in common: a mandate from the people of Northern Ireland. It is the ballot box that will decide Northern Ireland's political direction.

Those who are engaged in violence on the streets are not friends of unionism; they are the enemies of democracy. They play into the hands of those who want to see Northern Ireland's place in the United Kingdom threatened. What more could dissidents want than to see attacks on the forces of law and order in Northern Ireland? I know that there are questions to be asked and conversations to be had about Saturday's policing arrangements, but there is no scope for doubt about the attacks from a group in the Short Strand and the attacks from a section of the protesters.

We in the House rightly condemn the violence that has taken place, but we must also set out a political way forward. Last week, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party and I convened a meeting of the Unionist Forum to draw together strands of unionist thinking — those who were elected to the House and those who are not represented. I believe that that offers a vehicle for those who seriously want to discuss and address issues of concern. I also pledge to work with all those who are elected to the House to ensure that, together, we can build a better Northern Ireland. I have absolutely no doubt that that is the overwhelming sentiment of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr M McGuinness: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Speaker. I want to thank you for facilitating this opportunity for Members to have their say on the despicable events of the past number of weeks.

Over the weekend, people asked what the solution is. They say that there is no solution. I do not accept that. I believe that there is a solution, and I think it can be found in the example that was shown by all the political parties in the House in the aftermath of the murder of two soldiers at Massereene and the murders of Stephen Carroll and Ronan Kerr. What works for us is the sight of all the political parties in the House standing together against those who believe in violence as a way forward.

If we look at the events of the past couple of weeks — whatever about the decision at Belfast City Hall, a decision over which, according to my information in the Chamber, not a stone was thrown, not a petrol bomb was thrown, not a threat of intimidation was issued — we can see that what has transpired is very clearly a challenge to these institutions. It is a challenge to these institutions from

people who do not have a mandate and represent nobody but themselves. I do not believe for one minute that they speak for the vast majority of unionists in our society. These are people who are associated with British National Party-type politics. These are people who are clearly, to some degree, sectarian bigots.

It is also quite obvious that the Ulster Volunteer Force in east Belfast has played its part in the disturbances of the past couple of weeks, to such a point where two of its leadership who are well known drug pushers in east Belfast — that is known on the far side of the House as well as it is known on this side — have been the main instigators, to the point where, although it has not been said publicly by anybody — I wonder why not — that organisation was involved in the attempt to murder a young policewoman sitting in her car outside Naomi Long's office.

This needs to end. Political leadership needs to be given. We all need to stand together. I absolutely believe that the PSNI needs to do its job, and I hope to meet Matt Baggott today. So, the attacks on the community — whether in the Short Strand or anywhere else — need to end. They cannot be justified, and that end must be immediate.

Mr Nesbitt: I very much welcome the opportunity to repeat in the House on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party what we have said many times on the streets and in the media by way of condemning violence. The violence that we have seen since 3 December last is wrong on every level. It is wrong legally. It is wrong morally. It is wrong strategically, and it is wrong tactically. Let us remind ourselves how it began. On 3 December, an unnecessary vote to lower the Union flag at City Hall provoked people to take to the streets because they were angry at a political decision by Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Alliance Party. Almost immediately, those who were protesting through violence turned matters on their head. The Alliance Party, which they were subjecting to criticism, suddenly had everybody's sympathy — rightly so — because of the illegal attacks on premises and personnel. We then had the attempted murder of a police officer and dozens of officers injured in rioting. The very people who live in the communities represented — or so-called represented — by those engaged in violence, who began with a great deal of sympathy for the cause, became frustrated, then angry and now outraged by the tactics employed by those who engage in violence.

I have heard many times since 3 December, a call for unionist leaders to demonstrate leadership. We have to understand what the people on the ground mean by "leadership". What is their definition of that? I am trying to understand it. I am engaging on the ground. I have been, for example, to Westbourne Presbyterian Church no fewer than three times in the past 10 days to engage with people on the ground. Earlier today, I engaged with a group in this Building, and I hope to re-engage later today. What does that leadership mean? Well, it must mean condemning the violence and calling, once again, for it to stop, not least for the good of the youth who appear to think that it is recreational and quite good fun to lob a petrol bomb at a police officer and run away. They may not consider it such good fun if, in 20 years' time, they seek a visa to visit Florida or some other area of the United States and are denied entry because of the activities that they have been engaged in over the past weeks.

The leadership that I wish to offer is to condemn what is wrong but also to offer an alternative. That alternative, to me, is the Unionist Forum, a political way forward, where we can discuss the issues that underlie the vote on the flag — issues of cultural identity, of the economy and of the perceived failure of politics to live up to its billing of providing much better than direct rule. My message to those engaged in violence is very simple: please stop destroying the argument you are trying to promote.

12.15 pm

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the opportunity to speak this afternoon. The madness that we see on our streets and our television screens serves no purpose and can never serve any purpose. We could engage in the Chamber in petty “whataboutery” and score points. I get the sense that we may be entering an unconscious phase of denial about how the crisis came about. It did not come about on 3 December; it was well stoked beforehand. We can duck and dive around the hows, whys and wherefores, but, in my opinion, the most urgent need is to de-escalate the situation, and that means that protests must stop and stop now. That is a job for the leaders of political unionism. They must be honest with the people out there and tell them that the ways of the past on flags and many other issues are not always going to be the ways of the future. They will not and we will not improve the situation with a one-sided forum. In fact, there is always a danger that a one-sided approach or a one-sided, half-baked solution will escalate the situation further. Political parties have to come together — all the parties in the House — in a rolling series of discussions, not to tackle the flags issue in isolation but to look at the whole issue of cross-community relations on the ground and within the whole political process. There must be a parallel series of discussions with all the other external groups and organisations, where people are allowed to contribute. But the crucial steps must be taken by the leaders of political unionism.

The whole basis of our current political settlement and, indeed, our future together is parity of esteem. The leaders of unionism are either for parity of esteem or they are not. If they are, they must make that the basis of any flag settlement. For any leader to demand that a flag must fly on their terms and on their terms alone is in the past, and it is certainly not parity. Protesters are challenging the democratic right of politicians to make any dispensation on flags that they do not approve of. The protesters are denying parity of esteem. The choice of the leaders of political unionism is a choice that they have to make clear. It would greatly assist in de-escalating the situation if they would make that choice now and make it in the clearest possible terms.

Mr Ford: Mr Robinson talked about democracy and the rule of law when he introduced this matter of the day, and I agree entirely with him. The issues of democracy and the rule of law are vital for this society and need a lead from the House. However, we need to recognise that the violence that we saw on Saturday and preceding days was at the end of a line that stretches right back to last summer. Last summer, we saw the defiance of the legitimate and lawful rulings of the Parades Commission, and that defiance had, in some cases, political support. In the autumn, we saw that continuing. We saw 40,000 dubious leaflets whipping up fear and tension. That was carried out by unionist leaders. In recent weeks since 3 December,

we have seen so-called peaceful protests that have been anything but peaceful and anything but lawful. Many of those protests have had support from unionist leaders. Did they not know what happened last summer? Did they not see Clifton Street and Donegall Street? Do they not know what happens when you call crowds out onto the streets in this society?

There is a fundamental question that has to be answered by those who engineered what has now resulted. What we have seen from the protests is the undermining of the rule of law. We have seen serious damage to the local economy and to property in many cases. We have seen almost 100 police officers injured and many others injured and put in fear. We have seen the damage done to inward investment and tourism by these pictures being shown on television screens around the world. As others have said, we have seen young people being given a criminal record that will damage their prospects for life. We have seen, in fact, the resectarianising of Northern Ireland.

I believe that it really is time that we saw a united approach, a united approach that starts with this House. We need people to wind down the language and to not build and hype up the language that got people onto the streets in protest. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Ford: We need to see people who talk much of the rule of democracy accepting the democratic decision of Belfast City Council based on the equality and legal advice that was given to it.

Certainly, there are issues around deprivation in this society that need to be addressed. However, let us be absolutely clear: there is no correlation between deprivation in different areas of Northern Ireland and the areas that have seen the worst of the violence recently, even in predominantly Protestant areas. Mr McGuinness has already highlighted the role of the UVF in parts of east Belfast.

This society requires policing by consent. That means that there has to be support for the police and not constant criticism of operational decisions by people who do not like operational decisions one way or the other. The police require much more than that from us if they are to carry out the duties with which they are charged by this society. We can no longer blur the line between so-called peaceful and actually illegal protests.

We need from the House a firm commitment to build a genuine shared future. We need all parties working together. We need politicians not to feed fear but to resolve the issues that lead to fear, in order to build a better future. Most of all, we need to work together on a cross-community basis to build a shared future.

Mr Agnew: The Green Party condemns the violence that we have seen on our streets over recent weeks and calls for an immediate end to the protests. We want to make it clear that attacks on the PSNI are unacceptable. Some have tried to use the actions of the PSNI to justify their violence, but the Green Party is clear: the PSNI did not attack the home of councillors Christine and Michael Bower, nor did it burn down Stewart Dickson's office. If there is evidence of mistreatment of protesters by the police, it should be reported to the ombudsman and the Police Service should be held to account by politicians.

The Green Party gives its thanks to the PSNI for seeking to protect our democracy, our economy and our citizens in what are very difficult circumstances.

We in the Assembly need to take our role in tackling the underlying social problems that have created the context for the social unrest. High unemployment, educational underachievement and poverty of opportunity are the perfect mix for creating this type of unrest. We must be clear that these problems exist throughout our society in working-class areas across Northern Ireland. It is only when we unite in struggles that we can seek to overcome these difficulties. The protests have certainly done nothing to help the economic situation in Northern Ireland or to help us tackle the underlying social problems.

The protests have brought many issues to the fore. The flag issue may have sparked the social unrest, but many other issues have come to the fore. The Green Party believes that it is now time for a period of calm reflection and engagement, and we call on politicians to, at least, do no harm and, at best, engage to seek an end to the violence and the street protests and move the situation on to a peaceful resolution.

Mr Allister: I abhor and without reservation condemn the repeated violence that we have seen in recent days and weeks. It has no legitimacy, and it brings nothing but disrepute and dishonour to the cause in the name of which, in distorted fashion, it is purported to be exercised. Let us be very clear: there is no way forward in violence. However, some policing decisions have been, to put it at its mildest, bizarre. There seems to have been an aggravating imbalance in the policing approach, with repeated known processions coming from the centre of the city into east Belfast but no appreciable, detectable attempt to stop attacks on those processions from within Short Strand and no adequate policing. That seems to have been an aggravating factor, compounded by the foolhardy policing actions of last Saturday. None of that justifies the violence, but it is not immune from criticism.

The House and its Members rightly want to speak and condemn these matters, but I have to say to the House that it is severely lacking in moral authority in condemning violence. The House and its structures are the product of the Belfast Agreement or the product of paying the ransom price to violence that was the Belfast Agreement. It makes the job of some of us who try to counter that there should be no violence very difficult. It poses a difficult question: with regard to Stormont, did violence not pay for others and for Sinn Féin and those whom it represents? That is a very difficult question to answer. The moral authority is lacking in the House to say to people not to engage in violence because this House and its institutions and the denial of the basics of democracy — the right to vote a party out of government or even the right to have an opposition — are the very things that show a lack of authority in the House on the moral issues.

Part of the problem is that we were told that the Belfast Agreement was a settlement, but it was a settlement only for some: for others, it was a process. Part of the problem is that that continually feeds a need for further concessions to republicanism, and every step on the road is marked by a further de-Britishising. Those who come to the House to demonise protesters are, of course, those who talk most about the process and the need to carry it further, which, in their terms, means more concessions

to republicanism. That is what is feeding the commotion on the streets and demonstrably showing that the Belfast Agreement has not worked and will not work.

Mr McNarry: In the House, we are all agreed that there is no place for rioting, recreational or otherwise, or for violence directed at the police, elected representatives, ordinary people or their homes and businesses. However, I trust that there is every place to support and exercise the legitimate right to peaceful protest. The exercise of such a right cannot be contested and should be recognised by the House as an essential part of democracy.

What can be contested, however, is the escalation of the street disorder that flows from the ending of a peaceful protest. I attended a peaceful protest outside Belfast City Hall on Saturday. I left the area at peace and arrived home to hear the news that something had happened between Belfast City Hall and what is known as the Short Strand area. I cannot accept that a peaceful protest being turned into a street disorder is simply a happening. I cannot accept that it was not organised in some way, not calculated as a reaction to other things that are going on.

Is our country seeing something akin to the emergence of Northern Ireland's Arab spring, or is it just a frustrated number of people venting their anger against what they see as the Establishment, which they believe does not represent them? The Union flag was the catalyst for these events and is the focus of discontent. The unrest, as it develops after six weeks, is about much more than that.

12.30 pm

It is about the sudden realisation of a section of Protestants that they have been disenfranchised by the post-Good Friday and post-St Andrews political arrangements. To them, it is also about the erosion of their unionist identity and the failure of the main unionist parties to deliver for them. That is how they tell it and that is how they see it.

This unrest is increasingly focusing on the failure of the main unionist parties to deliver. I believe that the main unionist parties have taken control of that with the formation of the Unionist Forum. I believe that that is how it can be addressed. That is where we come in, so to speak.

Unionism has shuddered and recoiled, because we warned of the repercussions and consequences of removing the flag. However, the question now is this: who speaks for political unionism? Whoever speaks for political unionism must also speak for this nation. I ask that those who are on the streets with discontentment — those who would join with me in peaceful protest — allow the Unionist Forum to take forward the dialogue that is necessary.

Mr Wilson: I am sorry that we have had to start the first week of the new session of the Assembly with this subject. I say to those on the other side of the House who have condemned what happened over the past weekend — and we have condemned it quite clearly — that when they were engaging in activities such as voting for the release of people who attempted to kill a DUP councillor in Dungannon, naming play parks after killers, and stoking the fire by removing the flag from City Hall, they should maybe have asked themselves: did they not know what the reaction was likely to be across the community? There has been a grave responsibility on those who provoked this situation. That is not to say that what has happened

is correct. It is wrong, and it is wrong for a whole lot of reasons.

I am proud of the flag of this country, not as a piece of cloth or because of the colours, but because of what it stands for.

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. I have already said that we do not take points of order during matters of the day. I am happy to take a point of order after we finish this piece of business.

Mr Wilson: That flag stands for freedom. It stands for the right of people to believe what they want to believe and to express what they want to believe. As I listened to the news on Saturday morning and heard the poignant cries of a man who wanted only to get to see his wife in hospital but was jeered at by protesters, I thought that that is not upholding what lies behind the freedoms that the flag of the United Kingdom stands for. When I looked at the streets in Carrickfergus and spoke to the traders on Saturday morning, I thought that that kind of destruction is not what the flag of the country stands for. For that reason, the protests are wrong.

Secondly, they are wrong financially. I sat with people from the Lower Newtownards Road on Friday afternoon. They talked about the need for improved education for disadvantaged youngsters, jobs and lots of other improvements. If we are devoting resources to policing, if we are losing rates intake from businesses that close, if we are not getting jobs and having to pay more in welfare, we cannot spend money on the very problems that people who are protesting say need to be addressed.

This is my final point. To those who poked the fires, I say this: take responsibility for what you did. To those who keep those fires going, let me say this: violence does not pay. It does not pay for your community. It does not pay for the people in the streets of your own area who are hurting and it did not pay for Sinn Féin either. Sinn Féin is now having to sit in a UK-based Parliament, passing UK laws and seeking Royal Assent from the Queen. Violence did not pay for that crowd, and it does not pay for those who are engaging in the current disorder on our streets. My call to them is to find a way of expressing their frustration, and my call to those who have stoked the fires is to stop stoking and try to work for a better future.

Mr G Kelly: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I was not going to get up to speak until I heard some of the later contributions. Everybody condemning violence is the way to move forward. This is a terrible way to start off 2013.

Jim Allister particularly singled out Short Strand, and I could not let that pass without the voice of the Short Strand being heard again today. These were people who were sitting in their own houses, not involved — *[Interruption.]* They were sitting in their own houses and were not involved in anything. They were not involved in protests. The protests were supposed to avoid that area. That was agreed by the PSNI. So, the intent of those who broke off — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order, order. Let us not have debate across the Chamber.

Mr G Kelly: The intent of those who broke off from the parade and the intent of the organisers of the march was to cause violence, and that is exactly what they did. For over

40 years, this nationalist enclave has taken many attacks. I have to say that, when I was over speaking to them, grown men and women said to me that this was the worst time they ever remembered in terms of the fear that they had for themselves and their children.

So, the intent of the UVF in east Belfast needs to be dealt with. It is led by drug dealers and it is leading the protests, and that should not be ignored.

When David McNarry was up, he talked about the failure of the main unionist parties, and they can argue that out, but here is the issue: if the protesters are talking about deprivation, underachievement and all of that, why are they bringing it to the people in Short Strand? If they have an argument with the leadership of unionism, the place to bring that argument is to the leadership of unionism and not take it out in violence against people who are trying to go about their business.

Let me finish with this. Sammy got up and made his great speech about the Union Jack. I am Irish, and Belfast is now a shared city. That means that Irishness is important as well. So, the other side of the House needs to realise that the protests were over a compromise, that they are ignoring the fact that there is discrimination against Irishness and that they need to get their act in order on those things. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr Lyttle: I recognise the right to peaceful protest but that peaceful protest must also be lawful. It is clear that the blocking of roads is most certainly not lawful and that the wearing of masks at protests is not peaceful. It is clear that a small minority of individuals are intent on exploiting protests in order to exert social and economic devastation on this community, which serves no cause whatsoever and has been rejected by the vast majority of this community. It is indeed an affront to the values that the Union flag represents, and the PSNI must be given the full support of this entire House and our entire community to respond to this robustly.

It is also time for unionist leaders to take responsibility for their equivocation on the rule of law. It is time for unionist leaders to stop misleading people by saying that the display of the Union flag on designated days signifies cultural erosion: it does not. It is time for unionist leaders and all of us to reassure and remind those with any legitimate concerns that the Good Friday Agreement enshrines the principle of consent, rejects violence and stands for mutual respect for all identity and diversity in Northern Ireland.

Political parties can call for protests to stop, and they can deal seriously with elected representatives who continue to flout such direction. Political parties can give their full support to the PSNI and its responsibility to uphold the rule of law, and they can deal swiftly with any of their elected representatives who question the PSNI approach in an irresponsible and inflammatory manner on social media or any other outlet. Unfortunately, we have heard that again today from some quarters.

There is now a clear onus on all political leaders to support the rule of law and to address fears and causes rather than manipulate them. The First Minister and deputy First Minister have a responsibility to deliver a shared future strategy for all people in Northern Ireland that addresses issues such as flags, parades, dealing with the past, education, housing, deprivation, and the human and

financial cost of division in Northern Ireland. So far, we have had an abdication of leadership on that issue from the First and deputy First Minister. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Lyttle: The Alliance Party and the vast majority of Northern Ireland is clear that the only long-term solution for peace and prosperity for all people in Northern Ireland is to deliver meaningful action and fundamental change on all those issues. It is the challenge for this generation to stand up to that task.

Mr Copeland: I recognise as much as anyone, and perhaps more than most, the seriousness of the situation with which we are faced.

I will begin by quoting someone, who said:

"I have nothing and I am prepared to risk it all."

That statement has its origins, not in Northern Ireland and not on the streets of riots, but on the streets of Dublin, and it was said by someone who lived in Ballymun. I sense the urgency in this room to arrive at a solution, but I also sense that, in some respects, we are looking for answers to questions when we do not know what the questions are.

I can honestly encapsulate some of what people have said to me, not in so many words perhaps and not from a political point of view, but I can outline the fears of those who attend protests because they object to, or perhaps fear, the decision to remove the Union flag, not only from Belfast City Hall but from the Ulster Hall, which is the spiritual home of unionism. The symbolism of those two buildings should not be overlooked by anyone; it is akin to the symbolism of the General Post Office in Dublin.

When I speak to them, there is a sense that the Belfast Agreement, the amendments to it at St Andrews and the Hillsborough discussions were either sold, accepted or bought by unionism as an end to 40 years of murder, mayhem and the systematic destruction of the economy and the infrastructure of this country. Nationalism and republicanism was clear — perhaps it was not listened to — that they viewed the same document, the same piece of paper, as a progression along a series of stepping stones to the fulfilment of their original agenda. That is legitimate politically, but the movement along those stepping stones, in my view, is fuelling the fear that gives rise to the climate that these horrendous events can grow in.

I met someone on Saturday night who I have known all my life. He has been in business in east Belfast for 110 years, and he wept as he told me — *[Interruption.]* I mean the family business. If you think it is funny, in an atmosphere charged with emotion, that my meagre ability to communicate my views is a matter for humour, that somewhat suggests part of the problem on the streets. The family business had been in business for 110 years, and he was weeping and said:

"I am bankrupt. I cannot open on Monday."

I have seen young people, as has been said, setting themselves on a path to illegality and all that flows from it. There is a heavy responsibility on everyone in here. Anyone who knows me will know that, with my background, there are no circumstances under which I could ever countenance, never mind condone, violence. People see

the police being used as an extension of the will of the state rather than as the guardians of the law.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Copeland: Sorry, sir?

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr Copeland: I very much regret that.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. I will bring the matter of the day to a close and move on.

12.45 pm

Ministerial Statements

North/South Ministerial Council: Tourism

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in tourism sectoral format. This meeting was held in Armagh on 28 November 2012. Minister Carál Ní Chuilín MLA and I represented the Northern Ireland Executive. I chaired the meeting. The Irish Government were represented by Michael Ring TD, Minister of State for Transport, Tourism and Sport. This statement has been agreed with Minister Ní Chuilín, and I am making it on behalf of us both.

The chairperson, Brian Ambrose, and the CEO, Mr Niall Gibbons, updated Ministers on the work of the Tourism Ireland board, including the implementation of the 2012 business plan and the development of the 2013 business plan. The CEO made a presentation to Ministers on market performance in 2012. The Council noted that the 2012 marketing campaign included the roll-out of a new global advertising campaign and the extensive ni2012 promotional campaign, which has been under way across the world, reaching 100 million people. Ministers noted the roll-out of a new suite of websites designed to capitalise on the growing importance of the internet in travel and holiday planning and to harness the phenomenal growth in social media.

The Council discussed major tourism events and initiatives planned for 2013, including the inaugural UK City of Culture in 2013, which provides the perfect follow-up to the ni2012 programme, and the World Police and Fire Games 2013, which will be the biggest single sporting event ever hosted in Belfast. The Council noted Tourism Ireland's role in the overseas marketing and promotion of these initiatives, the importance of co-operative marketing campaigns and engagement by the industry in the platforms presented by Tourism Ireland. The importance of increased access to Northern Ireland was also discussed. Minister Ring invited Ministers Foster and Ní Chuilín and relevant officials to attend EU presidency events relating to tourism and sport.

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

The Council noted progress on preparation of Tourism Ireland's draft business plan for 2013. While noting the decline in visitors from Great Britain in recent years, Ministers welcomed the work of the tourism recovery task force, comprising Tourism Ireland, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, Fáilte Ireland and industry representatives, on the development of the GB Path to Growth strategy to address this issue. Ministers noted the recommendations of this strategy, which will be implemented by Tourism Ireland in 2013 and beyond. The Council agreed to meet again in tourism format in spring 2013.

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a ráiteas. Thanks to the Minister for her statement. We heard the earlier statements about the civil

unrest on our streets and the difficulty that that is creating, especially for the tourism sector. The Minister mentioned two wonderful events: the UK City of Culture in Derry and the World Police and Fire Games 2013. Can she outline how the Tourist Board is particularly emphasising the positives of those in light of the current climate and the negatives around that?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Chairman for his question. We need to look back a little. It is fair to say that we had a very successful year with our ni2012 campaign until the first week in December. That year was, of course, about attracting people to Northern Ireland and was also about giving the people of Northern Ireland a sense of civic pride in the place where they live, work and study.

So, as you can imagine, I have been incredibly frustrated by the violent scenes that have been shown right across the world because Northern Ireland is back on people's screens for all of the wrong reasons. Therefore, we have to counter that by continuing to build on what was a good year in ni2012 with the fabulous opportunities that have been presented to us for 2013. The Member is right to mention the World Police and Fire Games and the fact that it is the biggest sporting event ever to come to Belfast. Of course, the very first UK City of Culture provides us with a huge world stage as well, and we should not forget the G8 summit, which is coming to County Fermanagh.

However, we should be under no illusion: the tourism industry is at a critical stage. We were poised for growth before the street violence and disturbances, but, as with so many other industries in Northern Ireland, safety and security, peace and stability are critical features if we are to grow.

Therefore, I join other colleagues who have addressed the issue of the civil unrest over this past six weeks. It has to stop. If we are to bring jobs and prosperity to all of the people of Northern Ireland, we need to portray ourselves as being a place that is ready for jobs, prosperity and tourism. Therefore, I have no hesitation in condemning the violence that has taken place, obviously at a very basic level. When I look at the damage that it is doing to the very place that those people claim loyalty to, it makes me very sad indeed.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she confirm that she is confident in our ability, and that we have the infrastructure and skills that can be favourably benchmarked against any other part of the UK, to attract tourism to Northern Ireland?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As the House knows, we have been investing heavily in our product offering over this past couple of years. When I look at the city of Londonderry, which is to host the UK City of Culture, I am very proud indeed of the investment that a number of Departments have made in the city. I look at the work that is going into St Columb's Cathedral, the First Derry Presbyterian Church and the Guildhall, and I say that we have really invested in some of the product. I have not even mentioned Titanic Belfast, the Giant's Causeway and all the other initiatives into which we have invested money.

As well as that, the Member is right that it is not just about product; it is also about service. It is important that, when we receive visitors from right across the world, we have a good level of service. Many members of the industry have

been involved in training to make sure that their skills are up to date and, indeed, that they are the proper skills to have in their particular industry. I am glad to say that we are benchmarking very well against the rest of the UK.

Some figures came out, towards the end of the year, for the nine months of last year up to September. It was a patchy picture because we had not received the figures for the Republic of Ireland at that time, but the figures showed that the GB market had retreated and we were not receiving as many visitors from that market as we had done in previous years. However, I think that it is important that we look at the overall picture when we say that. If you look at Scotland, you see that their tourism figures are also down by 12%. Indeed, despite the fact that the Olympic Games were in London last year, their figures just managed to stay static.

So, there is a huge challenge for us in tourism, and it makes it all the more urgent that we settle down again and get back to doing what we do best, and that is welcoming people to our shores and making them very happy when they come here.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an ráiteas a thug sí dúinn. I thank the Minister for her statement. In her statement, the Minister made reference to the growth in the importance of the internet and, specifically, social media in relation to travel and holiday planning. I ask the Minister, therefore, whether she agrees with me that it is high time that a website is established that allows potential visitors to this island to plan and book their trip on a single portal instead of having to visit two separate websites? Potentially, as a result of the situation in which there are two different websites, visitors are not attracted to come to this part of the country.

Mrs Foster: The Member is completely misrepresenting the situation, if one may say, as usual. The Tourism Ireland website deals with all the international visitors who come to the whole of the island of Ireland. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board website is simply there —

Mr Flanagan: Did you look at it?

Mrs Foster: Well, it is being looked at at the moment, and I said in my statement that they are looking at an upgrade of the Tourism Ireland website. I very much welcome that because we need to keep ahead of the curve in respect — *[Interruption.]* If the Member wants to ask another question, I will sit down and allow him to ask another question.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her statement. She said that visitors from GB are down by 15%, and she also referred to the Tourism Ireland draft business plan for 2013 and the tourism recovery task force. Are those feeding into a tourism strategy for her Department? Will she update us on whether she is working to release a tourism strategy or whether there is an action plan in the timing of that?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for a number of questions. As I think I said to her previously, and as her party leader said, there are too many strategies. We need action. We have taken that forward, and the tourism priorities for action plan is being finalised and will, I hope, be with the Executive for endorsement in the very near future. I will soon write to Executive colleagues about it. The strategy was brought together by a number of our industry partners and by working in conjunction with government, and the

difficulty is that it was largely overtaken by the experiences and the new marketing strategies that we put in place for ni2012. It would be wrong if I were to put forward a strategy that was out of date. Would it not be much better if I had an action plan that pushed ahead with the issues that we have in place? That is what I intend to do.

Mr Lunn: I apologise to the Minister for not being here for the start of her statement. She will recall the discussion that we had last year about the major Irish tourism initiative “The Gathering”, which will also be held in 2013. Given that this is a joint North/South ministerial body, has there been any further discussion about possible co-operation in 2013 with regard to the people coming to “The Gathering” and our major events?

Mrs Foster: If people are coming to Ireland, either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland, for “The Gathering” — I am aware that some events are being planned in Northern Ireland in conjunction with “The Gathering” — we will of course signpost them to events that we are holding here, whether that is the UK City of Culture, the World Police and Fire Games or any activities that happen annually such as the International Beckett Festival in Fermanagh and other festivals. We are happy to work with colleagues in Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Ireland or any body that wants to help us to bring more visitors to Northern Ireland.

Mr Moutray: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will she update the House on the review of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board? Will it lead to a closer working relationship with other bodies, particularly on economic issues?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. As I have said many times, tourism is an economic driver in Northern Ireland, which is why it is important that the current civil unrest comes to an end so that we can get on with the business of getting more people to come to Northern Ireland, because those who have come are great advocates for Northern Ireland.

As I said, we are finalising the priorities for action plan, which identifies those responsible for delivery against each action, including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I felt that the time was now right to conduct a review to determine whether existing structures, policies, programmes and resource allocations are the correct ones to meet the objectives and targets that we are setting for tourism.

The Member mentioned an alignment with economic issues, and it is right that there should be a closer alignment between Invest Northern Ireland and the Tourist Board so that they can work together and not duplicate each other's work but add value to what each is doing in a particular area.

Mr Frew: With 2013 upon us and the two major events this year — the Londonderry UK City of Culture and Belfast hosting the World Police and Fire Games — will the Minister outline any specific campaigns to promote city breaks? How does a constituency such as North Antrim, where the Giant's Causeway is located, benefit from that?

Mrs Foster: I am happy to tell the Member that the new Giant's Causeway visitor centre has been a tremendous success, and we hope that it continues to be so and that we get some clarity from the ongoing judicial review. I think

that it would assist that area greatly to have a five-star hotel put in place for the visitors who wish to come to that area.

1.00 pm

In relation to city breaks, we work very closely with a lot of the airlines and ferry companies to make sure that they know what is available. Last year, we announced a collaborative working campaign between the ferries and the airlines to make sure that people, either in GB or further afield, were aware of what was on offer, and we will continue with that. If the Member has any suggestions, I will, of course, be quite happy to take them on board.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: I thank the Minister for her statement. I note specifically the discussion that took place around the major tourism events, and, in the Chamber today, I am hearing reference to the two major events. I am asking the Minister for assurance that, in and around that discussion, recognition was given to the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann taking place and its impact on the wider economy, and, indeed, for confirmation around the marketing bid for Derry as part of 2013. Go raibh maith agat.

Mrs Foster: I note some of the comments that the Member has been making about marketing the UK City of Culture and the fact that I am not behind the marketing of it. May I tell the House that that is the biggest load of nonsense I have heard in a considerable time? Nobody in the Executive has been more committed than me to the UK City of Culture coming to Northern Ireland, and I find it very disheartening when Members simply do not understand what is going on in relation to the marketing campaign for the very first UK City of Culture coming here — something that we are incredibly proud of.

If she thinks I am going to shirk any responsibility in that, she is, frankly, wrong. I am going to make sure that the whole of the United Kingdom knows about the city of Londonderry and knows what it has to offer for the coming year. Yes, Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann — sorry, I did not pronounce that correctly — is coming in August, but there is a whole year of activities happening in the UK City of Culture, and it is important that we do not forget that there is a whole year of activities in the UK City of Culture, and not just one at the beginning of August.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. May I first of all welcome the Minister's remarks in relation to the civic disturbances that have taken place over the past number of weeks? She has very trenchantly and eloquently condemned those. I wish to add my voice in support of that condemnation.

However, there is a problem in relation to the decline in visitors coming from Britain to Ireland generally, and to Northern Ireland in particular. Can the Minister advise the Assembly as to what she thinks is at the very heart of that? Obviously, there is a problem in relation to the economic and financial capacity of visitors coming here, but is there something more fundamental, leaving aside the present disturbances?

Mrs Foster: Leaving aside the present disturbances, global conditions, certainly, and in particular the ongoing problems in the eurozone, have provided a particular challenge for everybody involved in the tourism industry, regardless of whether you are in Dublin, Belfast or, indeed,

Edinburgh, for that matter. Our friends in the Republic of Ireland have experienced a 4-5% reduction in their Great Britain visitors. Times are tough, it has to be said; that is clear.

The main area of decline in Northern Ireland in relation to GB visitors is those visiting friends and relatives here. Our holidaymaker market has not experienced the same level of decline. We have held our own in a difficult climate, as far as true holidaymakers are concerned. Sometimes it is hard to match up the hotel occupancy figures with the other figures, and that is why I think we need a fuller picture of the tourism statistics when they come out. It is the friends and family visitors who have been reduced, and not the true holidaymakers.

To be fair, I do not know what the reason for that is; I do not know whether it is because of Skype or FaceTime, or whatever, and people not moving about as much. Or maybe it is simply down to the fact that people cannot afford to travel as often as they have in the past. Over the past five years, the outbound market from GB has declined by 18.3%. In other words, people are not moving out of Great Britain in the way in which they were in the past, and I think that we are experiencing some of that here in Northern Ireland.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her statement. In relation to increased access to Northern Ireland, what is being done to attract new airlines into the Province?

Mrs Foster: That is a key issue, and I have indicated to Tourism Ireland that I will ask about it every month. Unless we increase the number of air routes into Northern Ireland, we will not see a change in our tourism figures, because people need direct access into Northern Ireland. We will keep working on it.

Many of you who may have been through Dublin airport will have seen our huge display inviting people to come to Northern Ireland as they fly into Dublin, but we need direct air access from other destinations. We have good air access into Great Britain and the rest of the United Kingdom, but we need more access into European destinations. I have made no secret of the fact that I very much want to see a Canadian route back into Northern Ireland in the near future because there are a lot of links between ourselves and Canada, and I want to see us capitalise on those.

Mr Campbell: The Minister referred to the UK City of Culture and to Londonderry being the first ever UK City of Culture. She will be aware of some of the difficulties that arose early on in the campaign around trying to ensure that we hold a series of events right across the community that can be attended by all sections of the community. Now that, hopefully, we are over that problem, will the Minister undertake to ensure that she will do whatever she can to promote events that will attract attention and interest right across the community and not simply among those who seem to have a difficulty in using the "UK" part of the City of Culture?

Mrs Foster: I assure the Member that I share his concerns. Indeed, I have shared some of those concerns with the chief executive of the Culture Company because I want this to be a year that everybody can take part in. I want it to be a year when anybody from anywhere in the UK can come to the city and take part in the cultural events that are taking place.

As the Member is probably aware, there is a wide range of events. The Turner Prize, which is the UK's most prestigious contemporary art award, is coming to the city. We have 'The Return of Colmcille', which is a three-day performance based on the warrior monk. The writer scripted the opening ceremony for the London Olympics, and we are delighted that he is involved. We have the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, and the Walled City Tattoo, which I personally am looking forward to. The renowned Top Secret Drum Corps will be the international guests at that event. The all-Ireland pipe band championship is coming to Londonderry. There is a whole host of events, not forgetting the Maiden City Festival, which will take place in the city, as it does every year.

So, there is a whole host of things happening. I am very pleased to say that I will be attending the opening ceremony of 'Sons and Daughters' on Sunday, as is my junior ministerial colleague. We are very much looking forward to that because it is the start of what I think can be a real year of opportunity.

Mrs McKeivitt: I thank the Minister for her statement. The Council discussed the major tourism events planned for this year, and rightly so. In respect of the UK City of Culture, the Council talked about the provision of the perfect follow-up from Our Time Our Place. Can the Minister give me assurances about damage limitation, particularly with reference to the World Police and Fire Games?

Our communities in this region are looking to extend the hand of friendship to police officers around the world and ensure that they come and take part in the biggest sporting event ever to be held in the region. I recognise the work that local councils have done in trying to promote tourism, and rightly so, through the growth in social media, which was also highlighted at the meeting. Can the Minister give assurances that the damage limitation will be explored with every official possible to make sure that we get the best out of this event, given that the world is witnessing the damage to our own police force here?

Mrs Foster: I hear what the Member is saying. Of course, I have been proactive in trying to deal with perceptions that may have grown because of the worldwide media attraction and the disproportionate reporting of trouble that is taking place in a few areas of Northern Ireland. There are parts of Northern Ireland that this has not touched at all, and I think that it is important to say that. It is also important that, when the Member asks whether I will take my responsibility to ensure that the World Police and Fire Games 2013 is a success, everybody in the House looks to themselves and their responsibilities to portray Northern Ireland as the place that we know it to be — one with a positive outlook that is ready for the future — and not to retrench into naming play parks after convicted terrorists.

Mr Allister: Does the Minister think that Northern Ireland's tourism promotion and interests are best served by being a subservient part of Tourism Ireland? Would we do better standing on our own feet?

Mrs Foster: I think that the Member knows quite well that the creation of Tourism Ireland came from the Belfast Agreement, which I did not support. I did not believe that it was the best way forward. We are where we are. I continue to challenge Tourism Ireland to ensure that Northern Ireland stands out in all of its campaigns, as it is actually

statutorily obliged to ensure that. He can be assured that I will continue to do that.

North/South Ministerial Council: Trade and Business Development

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): With your permission, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement in compliance with section 52 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 regarding a meeting of the North/South Ministerial Council in trade and business development sectoral format. The meeting was held in the offices of the North/South Ministerial Council (NSMC) in Armagh on Wednesday 28 November 2012.

The Executive were represented by me in my capacity as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and by Carál Ní Chuilín MLA, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. The Irish Government were represented by Richard Bruton TD, the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation. The statement has been agreed with the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure. I am making the statement on behalf of us both.

The Council noted the findings of InterTradeIreland's cross-border study on the innovation ecosystem, which reinforces the view that supporting innovation is a critical channel by which to foster growth. Ministers welcomed InterTradeIreland's programmes that support an open system of innovation throughout the island.

Ministers also noted the work that InterTradeIreland has undertaken to support companies, which includes the piloting of two new programmes, Challenge and Elevate. Those programmes support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and microbusinesses to grow and develop through innovation and exporting against difficult market conditions in both jurisdictions. Two specific Challenge programme participants were highlighted, the Clada Group and Fast Engineering Ltd. Both companies have reported significant benefits from participation in the programme.

Ministers welcomed ongoing and future initiatives that are being developed by InterTradeIreland to encourage and stimulate greater co-operation to increase applications to EU framework programmes. In the period from November 2011 to July 2012, there were an additional 63 North/South submissions, of which 19 were successful and resulted in funding of €20.5 million. That represents an increase in funding of 51.2% compared with the figure for the period from the start of framework programme 7 (FP7) to November 2011.

Ministers welcomed the continued success and development of the US-Ireland Research and Development Partnership, including the latest collaborative proposal, WiPhyLoc8, in the newly added area of telecommunications.

The Council noted proposals for the Irish presidency of the EU in 2013 in the trade, research and innovation, employment regulations and competitiveness areas. It was also noted that Ireland will host a number of conferences and events to progress science, technology and research issues during its presidency. Ministers also noted that, over coming months, officials will liaise on the potential for Northern Ireland's Ministers or their representatives to attend events that are relevant to the trade and business

area during the EU presidency. Participation could include involvement at relevant events that are associated with trade and competitiveness informal councils, InterTradelreland's 'Collaborate to Innovate' conference, and the Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE) and EURO-SME conferences.

The Chairperson and the CEO updated Ministers on InterTradelreland's half-year performance against its 2012 business plan targets. InterTradelreland has made good progress in the first half of the year against its end-of-year 2012 targets, including 21 first-time innovators against a full-year target of 35 and a jobs impact of 115 against a full-year target of 150. It is also on track to deliver efficiency savings of 6%.

The Council agreed that the next trade and business development meeting should be held in early summer 2013. I commend the statement to the Assembly.

1.15 pm

Mr McGlone (The Chairperson of the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire chomh maith as a ráiteas. I thank the Minister for her statement. In regard to the Irish presidency of the EU this year, I note that there are broad thematic areas. Has the Department identified key areas or issues of specific interest or policies to be raised during the Irish presidency of the EU? Has it done any preparatory work in that regard?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. My permanent secretary, along with the permanent secretary from Minister Bruton's Department, sits on a group that identifies the areas where we think we can get the most out of this period of time. It will not surprise the Member to know that innovation, and research and development are the two key areas for us moving forward. That is why I referred to the innovation week conference being hosted by the Republic of Ireland, which we will, of course, get an invitation to attend. It is important that we try to get the most out of Europe in respect of innovation.

The Member will know that FP7 has been a tremendous programme, but a lot of SMEs had difficulties accessing the funding. We want to make sure that, with Horizon 2020, we are really up to speed in order to make sure that we draw down as much money as possible and, of course, get the benefit of innovation. So, I would say that innovation is probably the key area where we want to make sure we work collaboratively with the Irish presidency and make an impact on Northern Ireland.

Mr Newton: I thank the Minister for her statement and for what is, indeed, a very encouraging report, which comes on the back of the Enterprise, Trade and Investment (ETI) Committee report on research and development. Is the Minister satisfied with the level of co-operation on innovation and in that area generally? Is there an opportunity to further expand the level of co-operation by perhaps encouraging suppliers to work more closely with customers on innovation?

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. At the meeting, we had a very good presentation on the work carried out on the innovation ecosystem. It looked at different firms from across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to see what those firms believed was

important to them. That gave them the opportunity to say whether it was higher education institutes; financial services organisations; universities; innovation support agencies; customers; or suppliers. The two with which the firms were very engaged were customers and suppliers, but they were not so engaged with other bodies that could help them with innovation.

So, we have a job of work to try to say to those small firms that, although we understand why their customers and suppliers are, of course, primary in their thoughts when they look at their day-to-day work, they should look beyond their customers and suppliers to maybe their local education establishment or, indeed, local banks or other financial services organisations because they can help with innovation as well. I must say that I found the piece of work by InterTradelreland very helpful, and we can take it forward.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for her statement. I will be a wee bit nicer this time, and hopefully I will get an answer. The Minister signalled her intentions to work proactively with EU presidency, and I thank her for that. Will she consider trying to get roaming charges put on the agenda for discussion during the EU presidency? That is a big issue in respect of competitiveness and trade, particularly in border areas where businesses and citizens cross the border on a regular basis. There have been some indications from the EU that it wishes to abolish roaming charges.

Mrs Foster: I thank the Member for his question. Indeed, I note that the ETI Committee has taken this up again. I am more than happy to speak to my counterpart. It is probably Pat Rabbitte whom I need to speak to about telecommunications, and I am certainly happy to raise the issue with him again.

It is an issue I raised with Everything Everywhere, when I had the opportunity to meet them recently. It is an issue I have no difficulty in raising, because, as you say, it affects people on both sides of the border who have disproportionate fees applied to them. As I said in what is now maybe an infamous statement — I sometimes can be on something in Brookeborough that I should not be on — we need to take on board the concerns of businesses right across the border corridor. I am more than happy to do that, if the Member wants to write to me.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will the Minister expand on the piloting of the two new programmes she mentioned, Challenge and Elevate? I did a quick Google search to see what they were about, but maybe the Minister will expand on the timings of the pilot, the targets and how Northern Ireland will specifically benefit from those. I had better stop there.

Mrs Foster: As the Member knows, a number of programmes are available to companies through InterTradelreland. InterTradelreland is not there to duplicate the work of Invest Northern Ireland; InterTradelreland is to add value. Indeed, as its title suggests, it is a trade organisation and is there to help people to trade. Of the two programmes I mentioned, Challenge is to inspire companies that may be quite comfortable and do not want to think about growth to think about growth and be ambitious about growing their company and looking at all the opportunities to do that.

The Elevate programme is to get small companies ready to export and to look at markets that maybe they have not thought about looking at before. You may say that that is surely an overlap with Invest Northern Ireland; it is not if they do it collaboratively. I am pleased to say that the chief executive of Invest Northern Ireland and the chief executive of InterTradelreland, along with the chief executive of Enterprise Ireland, work together to make sure that there is no overlap between the organisations. I do not have the targets in front of me, but I am happy to write to the Member in relation to those targets.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for her statements. On the first, I thank her for her determined and robust support for the UK City of Culture. The Minister will know that the chief executive of the City of Culture is a young, confident, dynamic lady by the name of Shona McCarthy. Anything that comes from Shona McCarthy will be a success, I assure the Minister.

In relation to the second statement, has the Minister held any discussions on the treaties established with other countries by the Republic that have implications for the level of tax payable by companies there in the telecommunications and broader technology sector?

Mrs Foster: I have not had any conversations in relation to that matter. If the Member has the detail, I am happy to look at that. As I said to Mr Flanagan, the telecommunications field is probably Mr Rabbitte's, but I am happy enough to raise the issue with him.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for her statement. Will the Minister advise what progress is being made in relation to access to finance for businesses and industry in Northern Ireland and, indeed, the Republic of Ireland?

Mrs Foster: Access to finance is an issue that continues to be dominant, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses. In December, the Finance Minister and I met seven banks based here in Northern Ireland. We listened to what they had to say and shared with them some of our concerns. I was able to say to all the banks that they should have a closer relationship with Invest Northern Ireland, so that they can understand the market here and the sectors that we are trying to grow. The economic advisory group, chaired by Kate Barker, has been engaged in a review of access to finance for business in Northern Ireland. I look forward to receiving that report to try to establish, in particular for SMEs, what support is currently available, the level of uptake and the potential reasons for any gaps or deficiencies in the market. That report should be with me in the near future. I am sure that I will make a statement in that regard.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Like others, I welcome the statement made by the Minister. Minister, you mentioned the initiatives developed by InterTradelreland to encourage and stimulate greater co-operation for applications around EU framework programmes. An increase of 51.2% in funding, compared with the previous period, is welcome news. Nineteen of the 63 groups were successful, which means that over half were not successful. I do not want to be negative because that additional money is to be welcomed, but is there a theme to why over half were unsuccessful? Are we learning lessons from the programmes whose applications were unsuccessful?

Mrs Foster: I think that we are learning lessons. In some cases, it is about bureaucracy, to be blunt. This is not new; I have talked about it in the House on many occasions. It is why we have been pushing Commissioner Geoghegan-Quinn to make sure that the next programme does not involve as much bureaucracy. Of course, as with anything, the applications go through a process, and some will be winners, and some will be losers. It is important that we continue to push this agenda. As you know, Northern Ireland has increased its spend on research and development. Like you, I very much welcome that, but there is much, much more to be done. We need to continue to support innovation because it is the critical challenge for growth. It means that we can move the economy forward. We can translate innovation into profit and commercialise research and development into real and meaningful products. It is the very essence of what we are trying to do, and I am pleased to say that InterTradelreland is playing its part in helping us to push that whole innovation agenda.

Mr A Maginness: Following on from Miss Ramsey's question, I note the increase in applications to the EU framework programme. That is to be welcomed because innovation and research should be the lifeblood of business in Northern Ireland and, indeed, throughout Ireland. The Minister referred to bureaucracy as an obstacle, and that was certainly pointed out by the Committee in its report on this area. What is the Minister's analysis of the reasons for the additional success now being achieved by InterTradelreland in relation to such applications?

Mrs Foster: We and InterTradelreland have, it is fair to say, become very focused on innovation. In particular, InterTradelreland has held a number of workshops, and I have attended conferences with them. It is all very well talking about the concept of innovation, but, unless we can show what it means to businesspeople, they will probably think that it is a good idea but decide not to get involved. So it is important that we show them the impact that innovation can have. InterTradelreland has been doing that, not only through its workshops and conferences but through its programmes. As I said, some of those have been very good, and the Innova programme is one that takes a research and development proposal and tries to make it a reality for a company. So InterTradelreland's success is down to a combination of focus, workshops and conferences and, of course, programmes to try to assist in all of that.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat, Mr Principal Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for her statement, and I hope that I will get an answer to my question. I note and welcome the statement's focus on the SME sector. I ask specifically about the Horizon 2020 programme that is coming on stream and the appointment of its manager. Will the Minister update us on progress on the various contact points to be aligned with the universities across the North?

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland and InterTradelreland are very focused on Horizon 2020. The Member referred to its manager. We also have someone working for us in the Office of the Northern Ireland Executive in Brussels, and she intends to be at the coalface so that she can pick up any intelligence and information on what is new and what is happening in those areas. The programme is, of course, at an early stage, but I assure the Member and the House

that we intend to up our game on Horizon 2020. That is why we have put in place the resources to do so.

1.30 pm

Mr Allister: With less than 10% of our manufacturing exports going to the Republic of Ireland, in contrast to 60% going to GB, is there not a much more compelling case for an inter-UK trade body rather than an InterTradeIreland body? Is that another example of misfocus in the systems and strategies that exist?

Mrs Foster: The Member knows fine well that there is a UK trade organisation: it is called UK Trade & Investment (UKTI). We work very closely with it. Of course, our main source of exports will continue to be to the rest of the United Kingdom, to GB. InterTradeIreland was set up, as he well knows, under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. For the record, that is not something that I supported, but I have to deal with the hand that I was dealt. That is why I am trying to make it more focused, make it relevant to Northern Ireland and make sure that companies get the most out of it. It is a trade organisation; it is not a jobs organisation, as I think he may have mistaken it to be in some of his statements over the summer. It is a trade organisation; it is there to help companies. I hope that it continues to do so.

Public Expenditure: Autumn Statement 2012

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel):

I was hoping that the Enterprise Minister would keep going until I had eaten this sweet, but anyhow. Thanks, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to update the House on the Chancellor's 2012 autumn statement and its impact on Northern Ireland.

The Chancellor's statement included a wide range of announcements and measures. I will highlight only the key issues that impact most on Northern Ireland. They include the public expenditure implications for us of spending decisions taken by the UK Government. I would also like to say a few words about some of the tax and benefit measures announced by the Chancellor. I will conclude by highlighting some of the high-level public expenditure projections for the year 2015-16 and beyond, which will have significant implications for us all.

I will turn, first of all, to the Barnett consequential for Northern Ireland that result from the autumn statement. One of the key announcements that was made by the Chancellor was the top-slicing of Whitehall resource departmental expenditure limit (DEL) budgets to fund capital DEL allocations. The Northern Ireland Executive received a Barnett formula share of the additional capital investment allocations made to the Whitehall Departments. That amounted to £53.7 million in 2013-14 and £76.9 million in 2014-15. I very much welcome the additional capital resources that have been made available to us over the next number of years.

Members may also have noticed the reference to additional flexibility in our reinvestment and reform initiative (RRI) borrowing. That reflects a specific concession that we negotiated with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. It involves a flexibility to carry forward £50 million of RRI borrowing power to 2014-15. That additional flexibility provides us with the scope to manage the ongoing delays to the A5 road project. It is immensely helpful to us, as it minimises the risk of having to surrender money to Her Majesty's Treasury (HMT) at the end of this financial year. I thank the Chief Secretary for his co-operation on that matter.

The additional capital DEL allocations were funded by top-slicing Whitehall Department resource budgets. Thankfully, the Barnett impact on Northern Ireland was somewhat mitigated by the fact that the health and education sectors in England were protected. Those are areas where we have full Barnett comparability. In other words, our resource DEL was largely insulated against the negative impact of the Whitehall cuts. Indeed, there are some resource DEL Barnett additions to the Executive resulting from minor allocations for English business support.

The overall impact on the resource DEL budget was a small increase of £2.4 million in 2013-14 but a reduction of £34.3 million in 2014-15. The reduction in 2014-15 is relatively modest in the context of the entire block. Therefore, it does not require us to reopen the departmental budgets.

As usual, the Chancellor announced a raft of tax and benefit changes. I will highlight only a few of the most significant here. A major concession for Northern Ireland was the announcement that Northern Ireland will, subject to confirmation from Brussels, be exempt from the carbon

price floor, which is a tax on energy producers in the UK. For Members who are not familiar with this issue, let me be clear that that tax would have had a disastrous impact on our local energy market. Our energy generators would have been unfairly priced out of competing in the all-island market and would quickly have been displaced from the market. This would not only have raised local security of supply issues but would have led to significant increases in electricity bills for our domestic and business consumers. I am, therefore, delighted that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor listened to the case that I put to them and have announced an exemption for Northern Ireland. I believe that that will safeguard jobs in our local energy sector and prevent local electricity bills increasing to accommodate the proposed new tax.

There were also a number of tax changes that should benefit businesses here. I welcome the further reduction in the rate of corporation tax to 21% from April 2014. Of course, that is of interest as we await the outcome of our negotiations with HM Treasury on devolving that tax. I am also sure that everyone — businesses and consumers — welcomes the cancellation of the 3p fuel duty uplift, which was planned for this month. That is a relief to the many businesses and people who rely on their cars as the main mode of transport. Our small and medium-sized business sector should also welcome the temporary tenfold increase in the annual investment allowance to £250,000 from this month. This should support and incentivise investment by small and medium-sized businesses.

Changes to personal tax and benefits were also announced that will have an impact on most people in Northern Ireland. I welcome the increase in the personal allowance to £9,440, which will benefit those in work and take more people out of the income tax bracket altogether. In fact, I think that about 8,000 people in Northern Ireland will now be taken out of the income tax bracket altogether.

The announcement that increases to work-related benefits would be capped at 1% has attracted a great deal of attention in the media. Indeed, it is likely to mean a real terms cut in spending power for those who rely on benefits and tax credits for their income. I fully understand why that decision causes concern. Of course there is a disproportionate impact in Northern Ireland since a relatively high proportion of our population relies on benefits and tax credits, and it will present particular financial hardships for that group of people. That said, I can understand why the Chancellor took this decision in the wider context of reducing the deficit. The alternative would have been to reduce the DEL budgets further, which would have had a negative impact on citizens through reduced levels of public services. In that context, I would also sound a note of warning in relation to the wider welfare reform agenda. Let me make it clear that it is critical that we implement these UK policy changes in Northern Ireland in a manner that maintains full parity with the UK position. Failure to do so would likely result in unnecessary cuts to our block grant, and that would undoubtedly have a major negative impact on local people through reduced levels of key public services.

In that context, I would now like to say a few words about the latest Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts announced in the autumn statement. Members will be aware that the Office for Budget Responsibility provided updated economic and public finance projections for the

immediate period beyond 2014-15. It is clear that the OBR anticipates that UK economic growth will remain weak for a prolonged period. The implication is that UK public expenditure is now expected to remain constrained until at least 2017-18.

The Chancellor announced a single-year UK spending review to cover 2015-16. Although the broad parameters of the spending review have been announced, the outcome for Northern Ireland will ultimately depend on what spending areas the UK Government decide to prioritise. On the assumption that the UK Government will continue to protect health and education in 2015-16, our resource DEL is likely to increase by around 1.3% in cash terms compared with the latest 2014-15 position. Members should note that that is equivalent to a real terms reduction of 0.7%. On the capital side, we are likely to face a cash reduction of some 5.1% compared with our recent 2014 position.

It is important to realise that these projections are based on a comparison of the 2014-15 position, taking account of the autumn statement, which, of course, included a large capital DEL injection. In fact, compared with the 2014-15 capital position in the Executive's published Budget document, the capital DEL in 2015 will actually increase. It is also important to highlight that these projections relate to Her Majesty's Treasury DEL controls only. Ultimately, the Executive's spending power will also depend on local decisions in the Assembly on issues such as revenue-raising measures, borrowing, sale of assets etc.

Going beyond the 2015-16 year, it is important to highlight that the OBR forecasts further reductions in UK resource DEL, with only modest increases in UK capital DEL. Again, the impact on the Northern Ireland block grant will not be known until the UK spending review for that period is announced, although it suggests a continuation of the trend of public expenditure constraint.

This environment of relatively scarce public resources moving forward means that we must deal responsibly with all the major policy issues — existing and new policy proposals. Collectively, we must ensure that delivery of priority front line public services is protected in that environment, otherwise we will do the people of Northern Ireland a huge disservice. With that, I commend the statement to the Assembly.

Mr McKay (The Chairperson of the Committee for Finance and Personnel): Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and welcome the carbon price exemption, which will maintain competitiveness in the energy market across the island and save money for consumers.

The OBR figures do not provide a greatly optimistic outlook across the board. GDP difficulties aside, what projections for potential growth for the North have the Minister or the Department? If the growth projections are below average, could they be used to underscore the argument for devolving corporation tax powers?

Mr Wilson: First, if we look at growth in Northern Ireland, we can see that it has been sluggish; it has actually been behind that of the rest of the United Kingdom. Although we do not produce local GDP figures, the experience has been that we tend to follow the trend in the rest of the United Kingdom. Sometimes, that trend has been exacerbated here. We were slower to slide into recession,

and we are slower coming out of it. There are implications, of course, for the devolution of corporation tax powers. If the public expenditure position is tight, we must finance the devolution of corporation tax out of a tighter public purse, and that increases the pain. Secondly, it adds another side. If we believe that it can have an impact on generating additional private sector activity, that gives us a further reason to argue with Treasury that we need a decision on this quickly and the decision must be one that does not have a huge detrimental impact on the money available for public services in Northern Ireland. In other words, the Treasury should not use this as an excuse for grabbing more than the tax costs.

1.45 pm

Mr Girvan: Thank you, Minister, for the statement to the House. What has been agreed on the carbon price floor? I appreciate that it is a very important issue for staying competitive, especially in our energy and power generation end.

Mr Wilson: What has been agreed is that we will be exempt from the carbon tax. Basically, the way in which the carbon price floor was going to operate was that, when generators produce electricity, they burn fossil fuels, and there was going to be a tax for every ton of carbon that was produced. Since that was only going to apply to generators in Northern Ireland, that meant that the cost of generating electricity in Northern Ireland was going to be made artificially higher than it would have been in the rest of the island of Ireland. Indeed — here is the significance for people who believe that the production of carbon is important and has any impact on the environment — the irony would have been that power plants in the Republic that produce far more carbon could have become competitive over power plants in Northern Ireland that produce less carbon per kilowatt of electricity generated. It was absolute nonsense, and that is the point that was made to the Treasury.

The Treasury has agreed that we will be exempt. However, it has to have European support, but the argument that we have made to Europe is that it should not distort trade. In fact, if anything, the carbon price floor was a trade distorting mechanism, because it would have made us artificially uncompetitive with producers in the Republic. For that reason, I hope that there will not be any difficulty in getting the arguments past Brussels either.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for the report. Like all those reports, there is good news and bad news. One particular point occurred to me. The recent Budget realignment exercise resulted in the Executive being overcommitted by some £94 million in capital for 2014-15. How does the Minister envisage that being addressed?

Mr Wilson: The autumn statement helps us on that, because, of course, in 2014-15, we will have an additional £76.9 million capital allocated to us, so that helps to address that. Secondly, being able to carry the RRI borrowing — £50 million — over into the final year of the Budget also helps to address the capital pressures that there are. So there are two bits of good news in the autumn statement: the Barnett consequential and the ability to reprofile our borrowing.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as

ucht a ráitis. I thank the Minister for his statement. I notice that, in correspondence that the Committee received from the Minister's Department, we have been advised that ultimate spending power here will be influenced, either negatively or positively, by other issues, including revenue-generating measures, RRI borrowing, progressing revenue-financed investments and other major policy initiatives. That seems to me to be quite a precarious position to be in. Will the Minister elaborate on the issues involved and say to what extent the outcomes are liable to be more positive than negative?

Mr Wilson: It is not a precarious position to be in. All I was highlighting was that, in Northern Ireland, we have two sources of money available for public expenditure. We have that source that is handed down to us by the Treasury and that source that we have some control over as an Assembly and an Executive.

For example, we do have the ability, if we wish, to raise some money from local taxation. We have got the regional rate. We have the ability to raise money through the charges for some of the services that Departments sell. Again, that is a political decision. We have the ability to raise money from the sale of assets that we deem to be surplus to requirements.

We also have the ability to raise money from borrowing. That borrowing is somewhat limited, however, because we have to make sure that we do not undertake the borrowing in a way that scores against the capital DEL. There is no point in us borrowing and finding that, as a result, we lose some capital money from Westminster. We get the capital money from Westminster at no interest cost and with no repayment, whereas borrowing has an interest cost and a repayment. However, if we could find ways to make some of our public services more arm's-length, we could use that for borrowing. A classic case in point was the housing associations. We have encouraged them to borrow more on the market and rely less on central government grant. The more they borrow from the market, the more of that central government grant that we are not giving out we have available to spend on other things. We are bringing private money in without having an impact on the overall amount of money that we get from Westminster.

So, there is a number of things. It is not precarious; it simply means that some tough political decisions have to be taken at times. That is where this Assembly has, sometimes, been fairly poor, because we have always played on the cautious side instead of maybe looking at opportunities that may be available, albeit opportunities that may then bring some political criticism from various pressure groups or interest groups.

Mrs Cochrane: I, too, thank the Minister for his statement. I note that he talks about the wider welfare reform agenda and how important it is that we maintain full parity with the UK position. Although I understand that comment, will he confirm whether he is still in negotiation, along with the Minister for Social Development, with the Treasury about any NI-specific circumstances?

Mr Wilson: There have been negotiations. The Minister for Social Development is probably better placed to answer some of these things than I am, but we have already had a number of concessions from the Treasury on direct payments of housing benefit to tenants, for example. The Minister for Social Development is still in negotiations

about housing benefit and the occupancy issue because there is a particular problem in Northern Ireland in that regard. So, we have succeeded in getting changes in some things, and there are other things that have not been completed yet. That work is ongoing, mostly through the Minister for Social Development and his Department. Where DFP can add some weight to that, and where it is important to do so, we will.

Mrs Overend: I thank the Minister for the statement. He mentions local decisions taken on issues such as revenue raising. Will he commit to bringing forward alternative financing during this budgetary period, given that the investment strategy does not set out that that will happen before 2016?

Mr Wilson: With all these things it is important, first, that we identify how we can undertake to raise additional money without hurting the amount of money that we get from Westminster. Although I have had lots of discussions with the construction industry, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and a whole range of people who are interested in finding ways to bring greater private sector involvement to the provision of services in Northern Ireland, thereby enabling us to expand those services or to release the burden of paying for them so that we can use the money elsewhere, no workable ideas have come forward to date.

The second thing is that even if they did — I mentioned the example of making some bodies that are currently within Departments more arm's-length and independent and, therefore, not subject to the same Treasury controls — they would require legislation, which would involve consultation on that legislation and then the work of getting it through and making tough political decisions. There is no quick, easy fix there either.

One of the things that we could do better is to look at how some services are provided and see whether that could be done in a more cost effective way by the private sector or the social economy sector rather than by the statutory sector, freeing up money in doing so. I can think of lots of initiatives, even in my own area, in which good work can be done for a small amount of money, especially in social services and so on by the social economy sector, hence saving Departments money and releasing money that could be used for other front line services.

Mr Durkan: Go raibh maith agat, a Phríomh-LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his statement and his answers. One piece of good news in the statement that was not mentioned is that my constituency is to benefit from the urban broadband fund. On the bad news front, the Minister noted that the capping of increases to work-related benefits will have a disproportionate impact here. Will he advise whether that impact has been calculated and provide figures?

Mr Wilson: It has not been calculated. Work by a variety of organisations is ongoing to try to ascertain the exact impact of welfare benefit changes. That is also being done at central government level. One of the worrying things about changes in welfare is that, although high-level principles and objectives have been highlighted by the Government, they are still unable to provide information about the likely impact on particular groups.

That is one reason why the Assembly welfare reform group has been looking at what we can do with some

of the resources that are currently used to support vulnerable people. Should we be looking at pulling those resources together and finding an alternative way to support vulnerable groups once they have been identified? Again, that may mean making hard political choices about whether money is taken from some of the more marginally vulnerable groups. That is where real political problems will arise, and political leadership will be required.

I am glad that the Member acknowledged that the north-west has once again benefited from my lobbying and that of the ETI Minister. It is good that Northern Ireland has gained a disproportionate benefit from the infrastructure fund for broadband. We know how important that has been in attracting many businesses that use IT and need good IT communications.

Mr Allister: I note that the Minister is to benefit on the capital side from a windfall of about £130 million over the next two financial years, effective from the autumn statement. On the resource side, how and when does the Minister expect to get help to fund the G8 extravaganza? How much is it expected to cost, and how much of the bill will the national Government meet?

Mr Wilson: That is a good question. We do not yet know the full cost of policing the G8 event. I want to make three points. First, the G8 event will, I believe, be good for Northern Ireland. Given the sort of kicking that our image has had over the past couple of weeks, any event such as this, which highlights the willingness of other nations to come to Northern Ireland to hold major events, can add to stability in Northern Ireland and will have an important part to play in our image and profile.

Secondly, there will be significant security costs. There have been negotiations with the Treasury and the Home Office about how those costs will be financed. Although we have not yet been able to produce full costs, and it will be some time before that can be done, we have nevertheless been talking about the principles of support.

I am satisfied from the negotiations so far that the huge bulk of the security costs — I am not going to claim, because I do not think that it would be expected — will be borne by the Treasury and the Home Office. I am sure that the Member will appreciate that, since we do not yet know the actual figures, it would be impossible for me to tell him exactly how much in money terms or what the percentage will be. However, we expect the bulk of the costs to be carried by central government.

2.00 pm

Mr D McIlveen: I thank the Minister for his statement. Will the Minister outline to the Assembly why we should be reconsidering the use of revenue-financed investment over the next few years?

Mr Wilson: I will tell you why we are reconsidering it. The first thing is that, going into the next Budget period, all the indications are that any easing is likely to be on the capital side rather than on the revenue side. That being the case, most of the pressure will be on the revenue budget. Revenue-financed investment requires us to take money out of revenue expenditure. It was reckoned that, for every £10 million that you took out, you could get £100 million of investment. However, if capital resources are going to increase or at least not be as badly hit as revenue resources, it is right that we ask ourselves whether, if all

the pressure will be on the revenue side, we want to create further pressure. Mr Bradley asked the question earlier. Those are some of the political considerations that we have to take into account. It may well be that, when we come to look at the next Budget, the Assembly will say, "Look, there are so many important capital infrastructure projects that we need to do that we have to make that sacrifice". All that I am saying is that what we are being told by the OBR indicates that we perhaps ought to rethink whether we want to cut our revenue budgets any further when capital moneys may become more readily available, relatively speaking.

Executive Committee Business

Planning Bill: First Stage

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I beg to introduce the Planning Bill [NIA 17/11-15], which is a Bill to amend the law relating to planning; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Mr Principal Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is a motion to approve a statutory rule. I remind Members that section 33 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 applies to the regulations as they will impose a tax. I inform the House that the Minister of Finance and Personnel has given his recommendation to the regulations, as required in section 63. Members should also note that the vote will require cross-community support.

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

That the draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Before I detail some of the impacts of the single-use carrier bags charge regulations, I want to outline the broad shape of this initiative and how it weaves itself into a wider strategy. It is my view that Northern Ireland should be a world leader in carbon reduction. That is actually a quote from the Scottish Government's Programme for Government, which is well worth reading. It says that their ambition is to be a world leader in carbon reduction. Given the size of this jurisdiction and our population and the opportunity for government and our population to deal with issues of carbon reduction, not least because of the green and clean quality and character of this land, we should have the ambition to be a world leader in carbon reduction.

That ambition can have many expressions. Renewables can be Ireland's biggest opportunity going forward. The climate Bill, around which I intend to consult in the next number of weeks, can be an expression of that ambition. The waste strategy, which is out for consultation and which a senior member of a green NGO recently told me moves us from being behind other jurisdictions to being ahead of other jurisdictions, is an expression of being a world leader in carbon reduction. The opportunities on the island of Ireland for recycles, not least bulky goods and plastics, are another expression of that ambition. In my view, the regulations before the House can be another expression of how we, in this part of the world, can legislate for and implement a change of culture and practice that sees the reduction of carrier bag use as we pursue being a leader in carbon reduction.

(Mr Speaker in the Chair)

The regulations are to be made under sections 77 and 90 of and schedule 6 to the Climate Change Act 2008. The Act requires that the regulations be laid in draft and approved by a resolution of the Assembly. I am pleased to be able to bring forward the regulations, which will introduce a 5p levy on new, single-use carrier bags. The target date for the commencement of charging is 8 April 2013, which is

less than 90 days away. The key objective of a carrier bag levy is to reduce or eliminate — that should be our aspiration — the unnecessary use of bags, regardless of the material from which they are made. In that regard, we are very different from the Republic of Ireland. While the levy has been in place there for a number of years and has worked very effectively, it captures only plastic carrier bags and not other carrier bags, which is the purpose of these regulations.

Carrier bags make up only a small proportion of the waste stream, but the environmental impact of unnecessary production, transport and disposal is still substantial. That said, the annual use of carrier bags in Northern Ireland is 250 million. That is the scale of use, the scale of the threat to the environment and the scale of the ambition of the regulations. The introduction of charging will encourage a move away from the throwaway society and improve waste management by focusing on reduced waste regeneration and on reuse. Also, carrier bags are iconic. The introduction of charging will help to communicate the wider “Reduce and reuse” waste message.

Whilst I acknowledge the success of voluntary efforts in reducing the number of bags in circulation, recent figures have shown a notable increase in the number of single-use carrier bags handed out by major supermarkets. So, while a lot of retailers will be captured by the law and these regulations, the major supermarkets make the major contribution to carrier bag use and therefore they will make the major contribution when it comes to reduction on the one hand and the levy on the other. That demonstrates the need for charging if Northern Ireland is to achieve the progress seen in Wales, where the 5p levy came in in October 2011 and there has since been a reduction in carrier bag consumption.

I anticipate that the introduction of the levy will reduce carrier bag consumption by at least 80%. The cost to consumers is therefore expected to be very low. In addition, consumers can minimise any impact on their budgets by adjusting their behaviour and carrying their own bags with them when they go shopping. The 80% figure is not arbitrary. If you look at the experience of Ireland, Wales, Washington DC in America and other places, you see that the evidence indicates a reduction of between 80% and 85% in the use of plastic bags or single-use carrier bags when a levy system is put in place.

I reassure the House that there is evidence that those sorts of initiatives can have a disproportionate impact on those on a low income. My Department has, through the two consultations, looked closely at that issue because, generally and not least in the hard circumstances that we have at the moment, we do not wish to put an undue burden on any section of our society, including those on lower incomes. The evidence is that the consequence of the carrier bag levy will be £2 per person per year and £5 per family per year. Given the scale of those figures and given that the consultation demonstrated that very large numbers of those on a low income agreed or strongly agreed with the purpose of the regulations, I believe that the impact on those categories of people will not be disproportionate.

Members will also be aware that I propose to adopt a phased approach to the implementation of carrier bag charging. Phase 1, which we are talking about today, introduces a charge on single-use carrier bags, while

phase 2 will extend charging to low-cost, reusable carrier bags. Phase 2 will require new primary legislation. That has been endorsed, in principle, by the Executive, and I hope to bring the Bill to the Assembly later this year. The reason why we need phase 2 legislation is the risk that, if we introduce a levy for single-use carrier bags, people might move to multi-use, low-priced carrier bags and thereby defeat the ambition of the legislation passed by the Assembly in the last mandate. Today’s business, therefore, relates exclusively to phase 1, which is about a charge on single-use carrier bags.

Public consultation on the draft regulations took place between 16 April and 9 July, and 37 substantive responses were received, many of which were from groups responding on behalf of retailers as well as those representing consumers. In the main, consultees were supportive of the proposals. Having considered the responses to the consultation, however, I decided to amend the provision for exemptions. The draft regulations already provided for exclusions from the levy. However, I took the decision to provide for additional exemption. The draft regulations now include an exemption for bags used to contain hot food or hot drinks intended for consumption away from premises on which they are sold. That is different from, for example, the practice in Wales over the last 14 or 15 months, but I was persuaded by the representations, and, for the simplicity of the new regulation — I believe in simple regulation — I believe that, in those circumstances, bags are needed to prevent spillages and to protect consumers from the heat of the product.

I also considered whether to exempt certain biodegradable bags. On reflection, I decided not to provide for such an exemption at this stage. My policy objective is to avoid the unnecessary use of single-use carrier bags regardless of the materials from which they are made. I accept — it is self-evident — that some bags may be less damaging to the environment than others. However, even biodegradable bags have an impact on the environment through their production, transport and disposal. An exemption for those bags has the potential to reduce the environmental benefits of the levy, but an argument has been made. It is not an overwhelming, clear-cut case, and, consequently, I will continue to look at the matter on the far side of April 2013 to see whether any further adjustments are seen to be justified.

I believe that the exemptions provisions included in the draft regulations are sufficient to limit the use of free carrier bags to cases where they are really needed on the grounds of patient confidentiality, such as for prescriptions; hygiene and food safety, such as for meat from butchers; and the protection of goods and consumers. However, as I said, I fully intend to keep charging arrangements under review as implementation progresses. I will, therefore, ensure that the primary legislation to be brought forward in phase 2 makes suitable provision for the future review of the legislative framework, including the provision for exemptions from the levy. I stress to the House that that proposal can be relied on. A gateway review was conducted on how the Department has managed the proposal. That is where people from beyond the Department and beyond government look at how government is managing a policy development and implementation. That gateway review, which is a publicly available document, says that this has been a very good

example of how the Department has managed a policy initiative through law, through regulation and through implementation, and I acknowledge that all the officials in the Department, as well as the Committee, have managed that as a good, classic case study of how devolution can make a difference and work effectively on both the administrative and political sides.

2.15 pm

I can confirm that the levy will apply to all sellers in Northern Ireland who provide new single-use carrier bags, including those who use such bags to deliver goods ordered by mail order or online. Given the figures that came out recently about online shopping over Christmas, it is quite right that the ambition of the regulations captures online retail as well. However, I am committed to keeping the administrative burden on retailers as light as possible to minimise what sellers need to do to demonstrate compliance. Retailers who are likely to be liable to pay the levy have received correspondence providing details of the new arrangements, and two letters were sent to retailers before Christmas with two more to go as part of the communication strategy in the run-up to 8 April. As I said, contact will continue between now and that date. More generally, a communications campaign is well under way to ensure that everyone is fully aware of the new charging proposals. I do not think that we are coming from a zero base in that regard; I think there is a public and retail awareness about a levy scheme for plastic bags because of what has happened in the Republic and in respect of carrier bags generally because of what has happened in Wales. Therefore, I do not think that there is a lack of awareness out there, but, clearly, we have to escalate the awareness in the run-up to 8 April.

The draft regulations represent the legislation needed to implement phase 1 of the carrier bag charging arrangements. They make appropriate provision for the implementation of charging in Northern Ireland. I ask the Assembly to approve the draft regulations.

Ms Lo (The Chairperson of the Committee for the Environment): The Committee considered initial proposals for these regulations at its meeting on 29 March 2012, when the Department presented its public consultation paper. The Committee was eager to engage with the public on this issue, and it launched a blog on its Assembly web page seeking views on the proposals for a charge on single-use carrier bags. The Committee was very grateful for the comments it received, the vast majority of which were in support of the charge. However, it was very clear from the blog responses that any charge on bags should be done for the right environmental reasons and must not be a tax to fill a hole in the Department's budget.

The Committee also tabled a motion to initiate a wider discussion on the issue. A lively and highly informed debate took place on 29 May 2012, when the Assembly carried a motion recognising that the intention of a charge is to reduce bag consumption and calling for the list of exemptions to include environmentally friendly reusable bags. One of the key features of the legislation is the exemptions. The Committee received presentations from numerous interested stakeholders, including the retail and hospitality sectors, on which bags should be exempt from the charge. The Committee broadly supported the

Department's decision to follow the Welsh approach on exemptions but had some misgivings about the additional exemption here for bags being used for hot food. The Committee also questioned the extension of the charge to lower-cost biodegradable plastic bags. Members were concerned that this would send out a mixed message and were eager for the Department to explore ways to exclude these from the charge. The Department maintained that such a scenario was unlikely to achieve a significant reduction in bag consumption and could be detrimental to the environment as well as impacting on revenue.

This brings me to the estimated proceeds of the levy. Analysis of bag levies in other jurisdictions shows that a charge of just a few pence will result in a reduction of bag consumption of around 80%. The Minister mentioned that earlier. Although this reduction is to be welcomed, it raises doubts about the Department's forecast income in the coming years, and, with fewer chargeable bags in production and consumer behaviour moving towards reusable alternatives, there is the distinct possibility that the Department could be left with a black hole in its budget.

The Committee also recognised the importance of how the levy is communicated to the public. For many, this will be a major change to their shopping habits, and it is vital that the correct message is delivered. I know that the Department has an advertising campaign drawn up, and I look forward to seeing it implemented in the coming weeks.

Finally, I express the Committee's gratitude to the Department for its thorough briefings throughout the process and for its prompt responses to any queries that were raised. The Committee considered the draft statutory rule at its meeting on 29 November 2012, and members were content for me to recommend to the Assembly that it be affirmed.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Ba mhaith liom cúpla focal a rá as Gaeilge ar an ábhar seo. I would like to say a few words on this subject.

The Minister has highlighted that this is a levy, not a tax, and that the principle of all this is to reduce usage and the number of plastic bags. This is another step forward in addressing environmental damage and litter. Will the Minister outline a couple of things for me? Will the Minister indicate how much revenue will be generated and how much of that will go to administration? If there is extra revenue, will he indicate how much that will be and how much of it will go to other environmental programmes? That is the key to all of this. In relation to communication, how does the Minister propose to work with retailers and consumers on the roll-out of the statutory rule? With that in mind, I welcome the rule.

Mr Elliott: I thank the Minister for bringing this forward at this time. Obviously, there is cross-party support for it, and the Committee has been supportive of the process, as the Chair has outlined.

My questions are along the lines of Mr Boylan's. I note that in the debate at the end of May, which the Chair of the Committee referred to, there was an indication from the Minister that 265 million plastic bags were issued a year. I do not know whether that was single-use bags or plastic, but the Minister said today that the figure is 250 million, so it is there or thereabouts. The Minister indicated that

we are looking for a reduction of 80%, which would bring that number down to about 50 million. There was also an indication in the earlier debate of bringing it down to 40 million. One way or the other, the calculations relating to Mr Boylan's points are reasonably simple: if you get 5p back on each bag and there are 40 million bags, it brings in £2 million in revenue; if there are 50 million bags, it brings in £2.5 million. That is far short of the £4 million or £5 million that is in the budget lines for it. I know that, this year, we have already missed that target.

Mr Boylan asked how much the administration of the levy will cost, and figures for that differ from £500,000 to about £875,000 a year. So, again, that takes out something between £500,000 and £1 million. Although I fully support and appreciate the Minister's proposal that it is about better environmental practice and having a better environment, we cannot escape the issue that there are monetary values in the budget lines for it. I want to establish from the Minister how he will square that budget circle.

Mrs D Kelly: I do not have much to add except to welcome the regulations. It would be useful if the Minister could outline the methodology for enforcing the regulations. In particular, has the Department learned any lessons from how that has been handled in Wales or in the South of Ireland?

Mr Speaker: I call Barry McElduff.

Mr McElduff: Mr Speaker, I had not indicated.

Mr Speaker: Your name is on the speaking list.

Mr McElduff: Apologies for that.

Mr Dallat: I also thank the Minister for his statement and his expertise at linking the levy with the environment. Does he agree that investment in the environment is far too serious an issue to be dependent on the collection of money from bags?

Mr Allister: I confess that, in many regards, I struggle to follow the rhyme and reason of the regulations. A point was made, quite properly, about the financial balance sheet and the regulations. As Mr Elliott said, it is expected that the number of bags will be reduced to 50 million a year at 5p a bag, giving revenue of £2.5 million. I have yet to hear from the Minister how much the unit that has been set up in Londonderry to administer the scheme will cost the public purse, how much it will cost retailers to administer this wonderful scheme and what it will cost those who provide jobs in this country in bag production in losses. When the Minister answers, can we have some sort of credible balance sheet about where we are going with the idea of introducing charges on bags? Will it take account of all those issues? It seems that we are once more in the business of imposing a burden on retailers with little net gain for the environment.

I said that I had difficulty understanding the rhyme and reason of the regulations, and I find that particularly so when two facts are taken into account. The popular conception peddled for public consumption is that the regulations are about dealing with plastic bags. The regulations will, in fact, extend to biodegradable bags, so those bags, which do no harm to the environment, will be subject to taxation. At the same time, under the Minister's regulations, someone who picks up a carry-out from a local Chinese or from McDonald's will be exempt from taxation on those bags, which are most likely to be thrown

out the window of a passing car with its empty containers littering our country roads. However, a pensioner who walks to a corner shop to buy a few things will have to pay 5p for a disposable bag to carry them back home. That is why I struggle to understand the rhyme and reason of many of the regulations.

I am also concerned that we are at the beginning of the process and the Minister is promising or threatening that there will be a 10p levy on bags next year that will apply to all reusable bags. We have this notion that we will put a charge on plastic bags because we will cause people to think about their misuse of plastic bags, but, lo and behold, we will then put the same charge on reusable bags. I just do not know what we really are in the business of with a carrier bag charge. Financially, it does not seem to add up, and, environmentally, it does not seem to add up. When the Minister replies to the debate, I will be interested to hear whether he can at least answer some of the financial questions that are crying out to be answered.

Mr Speaker: I ask the House to take its ease for a few seconds as we move into Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

2.30 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Barroso Task Force

1. **Mr G Kelly** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the work of the Barroso task force. (AQO 3107/11-15)

Mr P Robinson (The First Minister): Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask my colleague junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer the question.

Mr Bell (Junior Minister, Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister): The Executive published their 2012-13 European priorities in May, maintaining the thematic approach that was established in previous years. Departments have set themselves 124 targets to drive forward our European priorities. I am pleased to say that at the halfway point this year, thematic groups have reported back to us that 95% of our targets are on track to be met and achieved and that 30 targets, almost one quarter of the total, have been fully achieved. We continue to drive that work forward through the Barroso task force working group. We are looking to enhance Northern Ireland's competitiveness and to promote new skills and jobs. We also want to encourage innovation and technological advances to address the climate change issues, reduce harmful emissions and promote energy efficiency. Finally, we want to promote social cohesion, including conflict resolution.

Last December, we were in Brussels to update the European Commission task force members on the key economic and social challenges that we face. Minister Foster also met Commissioner Almunia to discuss regional aid matters, and Minister O'Neill attended the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. So, European engagement remains a high priority for the Executive, and the First Minister and deputy First Minister will continue that work when they visit Brussels later this month to participate in an EU peace conference at the invitation of Commissioner Hahn.

Mr G Kelly: Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the junior Minister for his answer up to now. Some years ago, with a fair amount of fanfare, the EU launched a microfinance initiative. At that time, I think, there was something like €500 million right across the EU. It seemed to be a great idea at the time because it was there specifically for small and medium-sized enterprises. I think that you could get a loan of up to something like €20,000.

Mr Speaker: I encourage the Member to come to his question.

Mr G Kelly: Can the junior Minister update us on that? My memory is that when the financial institutions were brought in, and you needed the financial institutions, they were less than helpful. Has that changed in the meantime?

Mr Bell: I share the concerns that we promote our small and medium-sized enterprises in Northern Ireland. That work is largely taken forward by my colleague

Minister Foster in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI). The impression that I have received through my experience to date, and the active co-operation that we have received in Europe, indicates that there is a very positive focus from the European Commission on trying to support local businesses here in Northern Ireland.

It is worth considering, for a moment, the achievements we have made. In the 2012-13 implementation plan, there were 124 individual targets for delivery during the year. At the six-month stage, 118 of those, which is effectively 95%, are on track to be achieved; 24% have been fully achieved; and none is considered to be at risk of failure. The four thematic subgroups of the Barroso task force are continuing their engagement, and when we spoke to the desk officers in Brussels in December 2012, we heard that they were getting excellent co-operation, and the feedback from the Northern Ireland Executive office in Brussels was very positive.

The recent progress report from the working group is that it is assisting the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to present to the Commission the renewable energy project — the ISLES (Irish-Scottish links on energy study) — to achieve project of common interest (PCI) status. That will strengthen the case for future funding. It also presented the regional position on greenhouse gas emissions at the recent environmental council and is supporting DETI and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in promoting the region as an exemplar of best practice and research excellence in the connected health arena.

I could go on, but time does not allow me to do that. There are a number of marks of progress there.

Mr G Robinson: Will the junior Minister provide an update on progress on the Executive target to increase drawdown of European corrective funding by 20% in 2015?

Mr Bell: Yes. In the coming months, as part of year two, which is 2012-13, we will re-examine the baseline and report on progress that officials are making. The positive news is that the Executive set the target of a 20% increase in the drawdown of EU competitive funds over the four years from April 2011 to March 2015. That equates to a drawdown of £53 million over the four-year period, which is an average of £13.2 million per year. I am pleased to report that in year one, 2011-12, the total reported drawdown has been £15.8 million, and that in the current year, year two, indications are that we will secure around £13.5 million of additional drawdown. Departments have now agreed targets for the remaining two years, which, if fully met, will exceed the £53 million target.

Mrs Overend: The junior Minister will be aware of the Whitehall upstream engagement process, where devolved Administrations are consulted by Westminster on matters of priority in Europe. Will the Minister outline the objectives that have been highlighted by the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) through this process?

Mr Bell: The objectives that we have been working on are set out in our European priorities that we have taken forward but we continue to work on a quarterly basis. We meet in Whitehall, and the meeting is chaired by the Foreign Secretary, William Hague, or Minister David Lidington. On the last occasion, both were in attendance.

We continue to work fully with our UK counterparts to deliver against our programme. What we also do when we are in Brussels — we did it again in December — is meet the head of the United Kingdom Permanent Representation to the EU. We set out the way ahead and what our European priorities are. As you know, those are being taken forward through the thematic groups in the Barroso task force, and continuing a cross-departmental approach is the way forward.

The groups are now looking to 2013-14 to set their priorities, reflecting the Commission's legislative programme of 2013 and our Programme for Government priorities. We are also looking to recognise the opportunity that this year will provide to influence and shape European Union decisions on policies such as the common agricultural policy, regional aid, structural funds and Horizon 2020, all of which will have a major impact on Northern Ireland over the next seven years.

Mr Byrne: Given that Ireland has just taken over the presidency of the EU for the next six months, can the Minister outline what interdepartmental discussions are taking place about trying to make sure that we maximise our potential in the CAP reform discussions?

Mr Bell: I know that there is a question to that effect, question 10, but we last updated Members on our involvement with the Irish Government during their presidency of the Council of the European Union in November 2012. Since then, the Irish Government have finalised their detailed programme and priorities for their presidency, with particular emphasis on stability, jobs and growth. We met the Irish Permanent Representation to show the needs that we have in Northern Ireland in respect of our Programme for Government and our European priorities. The focus of the presidency will be to drive recovery in Europe and to secure agreement, including with the European Parliament, on a comprehensive programme of policy and legislation. That will include advancing and concluding negotiations on the 67 or so regulations, including those, as the Member has asked, covering common agricultural policy reform and the cohesion policy, which would follow the agreement on the multi-annual financial framework for 2014 to 2020.

During our visit to Brussels in December, we took the opportunity to raise our interest in many of the issues with the head of the Irish Permanent Representation. The First Minister and deputy First Minister will have the opportunity to receive an update on the progress of the presidency from the ambassador when they meet him in Brussels later this month. Of course, final decisions rest with the Irish Government, whose job it is to broker the agreement between the Council and the European Parliament. For that reason, the First Minister and deputy First Minister will also meet the President of the Parliament, Martin Schulz, with a view to promote our interests during the presidency. We are particularly pleased to be involved in the first informal Council presidency meeting in Dublin on 20 and 21 January 2013. We understand that invitations to attend presidency events have been and will be extended to other Ministers as the presidency progresses. That will give Executive colleagues a similar opportunity to share perspectives and promote our interests internationally.

We present a good case with our European priorities. We have a challenging Programme for Government. We

have got to focus on that. We will use every opportunity in Europe to deliver for the people of Northern Ireland.

Social Investment Fund: Educational Underachievement

2. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the social investment fund could be used to target educational underachievement among Protestant working-class boys. (AQO 3108/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: A key strategic objective of the social investment fund is to build pathways to employment by addressing educational underachievement, tackling barriers to employment and reducing skills deficits. The Executive recognised the need to address the systemic issues that are linked to deprivation. We took action to introduce the new social investment fund as an important lever to tackle multigenerational poverty and to improve future outcomes for children and young people.

There is a specific issue of educational underachievement among Protestant working-class boys. We want urgent action to improve outcomes. We expect steering groups to target interventions where evidence shows that there is a need to address the issue. Groups are working on plans. They are due to be with the Department by the end of January. In addition, we have identified educational underachievement as a priority issue to be addressed by our new cross-departmental Delivering Social Change agenda. Educational underachievement impacts negatively across a wide range of social policies. We are determined to make tangible improvements. Indeed, the signature programme for numeracy and literacy that we announced recently under the Delivering Social Change framework signals our commitment on that issue. I am pleased to say that plans are at an advanced stage. The Department of Education will move shortly to begin the recruitment of teachers for the scheme.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the First Minister for his answer. He will be aware that at the first public meeting of the Unionist Forum on the Lower Newtownards Road on Friday 11 January 2013, educational underachievement by Protestant working-class boys was one of the key issues. I wonder whether the First Minister agrees with that community that that is one of the definitions of the failure of Sinn Féin's tenure of the Education Ministry over the past 10 years?

Mr P Robinson: The issue of educational under-attainment in working-class Protestant communities has, probably, got a lead-in period that goes much beyond even the life of the Assembly itself. It needs to be tackled. It should be tackled. The first point in doing so is, obviously, the Department of Education. I am sure that the Minister of Education would want to tell the Assembly of the various steps that his Department has taken to tackle that issue.

When we looked at our agenda of Delivering Social Change, the deputy First Minister and I were of the view that we should make a contribution. I do not think that any one Department needs to take sole ownership of the issue. We made our contribution by bringing forward proposals that looked at employing another 230 teachers for one-to-one tutoring of children who are falling behind. With a joined-up approach required, we also put funding into improving parenting, which is an important aspect. I know from my own contacts in the social investment

fund steering group for East Belfast that it is one of the issues that the steering group is taking seriously. I think, therefore, that one will see local proposals come forward that will also assist in that.

Miss M McIlveen: Last week, it was reported that the literacy and numeracy project had been delayed by the Department of Education. Can the First Minister assure the House that that important project will be taken forward as soon as possible?

Mr P Robinson: There was a report, which I think was in the 'Irish News', that indicated that the project was now three months behind and had not been published. In actual fact, when the deputy First Minister and I announced the scheme, we indicated that it would be early next year before the Department could start to move forward with that. We simply make the money available, which then goes to the Department of Education to prepare a scheme.

2.45 pm

Obviously, we are disappointed that we did not get the numeracy and literacy scheme from the Department earlier, but we have made moves to address any lack of progress and are pleased to say that we now have a detailed scheme from the Department for consideration.

I think it is also worth pointing out that the new Delivering Social Change agenda is cross-cutting and cross-departmental. I acknowledge that this new way of working will challenge Departments that have traditionally been comfortable doing what they have always done or sitting within the silo of their own Department, and I am not just talking about the Department of Education. The attitude of Departments acting on their own needs to be challenged, and we need to increase cross-cutting and cross-departmental working on these matters. Departments need to acknowledge that what they do impacts not only on their own departmental field but right across government and society. We are determined to break down that silo mentality and ensure meaningful collaboration on these significant policy areas.

Mr Hazzard: The Minister singled out educational underachievement amongst Protestant working-class boys. Will he also acknowledge that educational underachievement is not located solely in any one section of our community? Additionally, does he recognise that the best way of addressing underachievement is through mixed-ability learning? In light of that, will he now sign up to opposing the segregation of our children at 11 years old?

Mr P Robinson: I am very keen that we should end segregation in education. I wonder whether the Member will join us in calling for shared education in Northern Ireland at every level, not just from 11 years of age. I acknowledge that although it is clear statistically that there is a greater prevalence of educational underachievement among Protestant working-class boys, this is not an exclusively Protestant working-class issue. Wherever it is manifest, the social investment fund steering groups are clearly able to target it and take steps that might assist.

It must be a cause for concern for any of us in the House that significant numbers of people who go through our education system do not, at the end of many years, have the numeracy and literacy skills necessary to be able to get decent jobs in Northern Ireland. That is a concern

across the community, no matter from which section of the community you come.

Mr Dickson: First Minister, can we be assured that the use of social investment fund (SIF) money will be subject to the appropriate scrutiny, that we may see what the outcomes will be, and that the social investment fund will not be seen or perceived as a reward for violence?

Mr P Robinson: The requirement will be exactly the same as it is for other Executive funding, in that it will be necessary for it to go through the same challenging business case and other processes. We have a period — I think that it is between March and May — for the various plans to go through that process. So it will be the same rigorous process that is used for any other government spend.

Social Investment Fund

3. **Mr Easton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund. (AQO 3109/11-15)

5. **Mr Newton** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the social investment fund. (AQO 3111/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will answer questions 3 and 5 together. At the outset, let me say that it has always been important to us that the social investment fund is delivered in partnership with communities. SIF is a practical example of key stakeholder groups working together, side by side, for the benefit of communities as a whole.

Since October, our officials have been working alongside steering groups to ensure communities across all nine social investment zones are engaged in the process to identify objective needs and potential projects to tackle those needs. Following that engagement, steering groups are now entering the final stage of completing their draft area plans and prioritising projects, with local input to ensure maximum impact on the ground.

As you may be aware, we recently confirmed that the first phase of the social investment fund will operate until March 2016. That provides a longer time for the delivery of projects in targeted communities and will encourage maximum impact. In order to ensure that area plans are reflective of that and to respond to requests from a number of partnerships and key stakeholders, we have extended the area planning stage by one month. We now expect steering groups to submit final plans to the Department by the end of February, although I expect to get draft plans by the end of January. Upon receipt, the plans will be subject to a quality assurance review, with economic appraisals being completed before final decisions are made on the projects that are to be funded. We expect projects to begin in communities soon afterwards.

Mr Easton: I thank the First Minister for his answer. Does the First Minister agree that the social investment fund has huge potential to deliver for areas that have traditionally fallen outside funding streams such as neighbourhood renewal? Is he able to outline a timescale for the release of funding under the community plan?

Mr P Robinson: I do recognise that the fund will have significant importance not only for areas that have traditionally been outside the neighbourhood renewal

areas but for neighbourhood renewal areas. Considering that large swathes of the country did not enjoy the benefit of neighbourhood renewal, it will be particularly so for those areas.

This is a new way of doing things. That is some of the reason why it was necessary for us to take so long to ensure that our processes were right. This is a partnership with the community. Instead of Stormont telling people down in the local areas what their area needs, this is the opportunity for local communities to examine what the needs and requirements are in their communities and to put forward proposals for funding to meet the desire and need of that area. I think that it is particularly useful in building up local democracy. I see it, and I know that the deputy First Minister is in the same position, that we will monitor very closely how it proceeds, to see what further we can do. My concern is not so much that it be welcomed on the ground; my concern is that the expectations on the ground are so great, the funds may not be able to meet those expectations.

Mr Newton: I think that, in answering Mr Easton's supplementary question, the First Minister has, in fact, covered much of what I was going to ask. It is about the local democracy, and the fact that the social investment fund panel will be the lead, with officials and consultants there to provide assistance. The First Minister has confirmed that that is the case.

Mr P Robinson: That is the case. It is worth pointing out that the local input goes beyond the steering groups. The steering groups are required, although they would do it even if they were not, to speak to groups throughout the zone that they have responsibility for. They are being aided by consultants in doing that. So although, at present, the panels consist of political and community representatives, they do have the benefit of getting input from the wider community before they bring forward any proposals. It might be worth saying that, beyond the community and political representatives, we do have to add to those groups representatives from business and statutory organisations. It was, however, felt to be important that, before we started doing that, we would see the shape of what local communities wanted, which would give us a better idea of which statutory agencies should be involved in a particular zone. As far as the business community is concerned, it would let us know what kind of business interests would be best suited to the needs of that zone.

Mr Agnew: I welcome the comments from the First Minister in answer to the previous question on the social investment fund, and that he is keen to see more collaboration across Departments and an end to silo mentality. Does he agree that that can happen if there is clear leadership from the top, but that if we want to turn best practice into common practice, that collaboration needs a statutory underpinning?

Mr P Robinson: There is nothing that stops Departments working together. One of the difficulties with the kind of political system we have is that there will be greater collaborative working between Departments with same-party Ministers. That is perhaps what we need to break down, so that people involved in the various themes can come together. We do that with a number of the groups that have been set up out of the Executive. We have a number of Executive subgroups that bring Ministers from different Departments together to deal with issues. It is

not a new thing, and not unique to Northern Ireland, that Departments — I do not talk about Ministers only in this respect; I talk also about officials — get very defensive of their empire and very reluctant to allow others to collaborate with them. So it is a culture that needs to be broken down. From everything that I have seen of this Executive, they are up to doing that.

Mr Allister: I revert to the potential of the social investment fund to help to address educational underachievement. How does that sit with the Executive's policy, as administered by the Education Minister, of closing educational establishments, such as Orangefield High School, in affected areas and the proposition that Ballee Community High School in Ballymena, which serves the Harryville district, another area of high underachievement, be closed?

Mr P Robinson: Decisions have to be taken. I have been in opposition for most of my political life, and it is always easy to criticise Ministers for closing a school. However, you have to look at the facts and figures behind that. If, for instance, the number of pupils in a school gets down to about 100, and the children are being urged to go to other schools in the area, it becomes difficult economically and feasibly for that school to continue. The Member mentioned Orangefield, and I am in a better position to talk about that school than some of those in his constituency. When a meeting of Orangefield parents took place, the overwhelming majority were very glad to have the offer to send their children to Ashfield instead. So we need to look at the particulars because what may be right in one set of circumstances may be not be the answer in another. We need to get the best value that we can for the money that is available to us, whether in the Education Department or for any other Department's work. Closing an establishment is unpopular, and it is a difficult decision for anybody, whether we are talking about hospitals, other health facilities, education or anything else because there is an attachment to it. If the education of children is what is important, you have to look at how best they can be educated and whether they will be best educated if the resources are spread out in such a way that they do not get full value from the school in which they are currently taught.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

4. **Mr Lynch** asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the cost to date of the historical institutional abuse inquiry. (AQO 3110/11-15)

Mr P Robinson: Mr Speaker, with your permission, I will ask junior Minister Jonathan Bell to answer this question.

Mr Bell: As of 31 December 2012, the amount spent on the inquiry into historical institutional abuse stood at approximately £153,000. OFMDFM's commitment to meeting the cost of the inquiry is enshrined in the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill, which passed its Final Stage in the Assembly on 11 December and awaits Royal Assent. The inquiry has been carefully planned and costed to ensure that it meets the needs of victims and survivors and fulfils its terms of reference. Appropriate governance and accountability arrangements are being put in place to ensure robust budgetary control while protecting the independence of the inquiry.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fheagra sin. I thank the Minister for answering my question. I am sure that the Minister, like the rest of us, has heard stories of lawyers filling in forms to enable victims and survivors to attend the acknowledgment forum and putting themselves down to accompany them. In light of the fact that lawyers are not being paid for doing so, does the Minister have any information on how many have attended the forum with their clients?

Mr Bell: First and foremost, this issue was raised with us by many of the victims whom we spoke to across Northern Ireland. It was the victims who said to us that they did not want an over-lawyered, expensive inquiry. They were interested in getting to the truth of what occurred; in having a proper independent and very judicious examination of what occurred; in the publication of a proper report; and in the apology and different elements of the inquiry that I outlined in earlier debates. The position of lawyers accompanying victims and survivors to the acknowledgement forum or the inquiry is clear: victims and survivors are welcome to bring a companion with them when speaking to the forum or the statutory inquiry. Although there is no bar on a lawyer attending in the capacity of a companion, the role of a companion is to assist and support a victim or survivor in recounting his or her experiences.

It is not the role of a companion to represent them in a legal capacity or otherwise. A lawyer who attends as a companion will not be paid for their attendance by OFMDFM or the inquiry.

3.00 pm

We should note that one of the most eminent former judges Sir Anthony Hart is taking forward the inquiry. He has considerable experience in the legal field. Referrals for child abuse, the criminal process and the civil proceedings all go ahead outside of the inquiry, as per the normal joint protocol rules between social services and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. There is legal aid for legal representation in criminal cases.

Finance and Personnel

Business: Flag Protests

1. **Mr Eastwood** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what help he can offer to businesses in Belfast and other areas which have suffered losses due to the recent flag protests. (AQO 3122/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I am glad that the SDLP has now shown some concern about the impact of an issue that it is partly responsible for. Unfortunately, traders across Northern Ireland are bearing the brunt of a very bad political decision that did not need to be made in the first place.

We have to look at what is possible. It is really a matter for the Executive to consider what help, if any, can be given to those who have been impacted by some of the protests. There is scope, of course, in the Financial Assistance Act (Northern Ireland) 2009 to devise some kind of hardship scheme to assist businesses, especially those dependent on the night-time economy and the hospitality trade which

have been perhaps the most badly affected in some areas. However, it would have to be thought through. The Assembly cannot simply afford to use public expenditure to provide blanket financial support to the business sector. Nor, indeed, would it be appropriate to do so.

My Department has little or no authority to deal with the issue. I have looked at a number of things. The hardship rate relief scheme is in existence, but it requires firm evidence of consequential trading loss over a sustained period before we can lend help to those who are in financial distress. In the past, it was used during the time of foot-and-mouth disease, the volcanic ash cloud and other periods of long-term sporadic civil unrest. There could be rateable revaluations, but that requires an appeal; it would not bring immediate respite to the businesses.

Mr Eastwood: I take it that the Minister agrees with me that the flag protests have created a huge burden on the business owners, especially those in his city of Belfast. I am glad to hear that he is looking at options. Will he do that with a real sense of urgency to try to lift the burden off some of those very hard-pressed retailers, restaurateurs and bar owners? If this thing goes on any longer, a lot of them will go out of business.

Mr Wilson: It is a great pity that the consequences of the decision on the flag issue were not thought through more by the parties that sit on the other side of the House. The decision did not have to be made. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: There was no demand for that decision to be made. The decision came at the worst possible time. Perhaps a bit of political insight at that stage, rather than simply pandering — the SDLP, of course, is very good at following the lead of Sinn Féin — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Wilson: Then, of course, it was aided and abetted in that by the Alliance Party. Perhaps that is when thought should have been given to this issue.

Of course, with all the constraints that I have given in the answer to date, we will look at the possible options. In fact, I intend to meet some people from the hospitality industry, along with Arlene Foster. I will spell out to them what options might be available and the difficulties with all those options.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: There definitely was an impact on the traders — nobody is going to dispute that — but it might be possible to identify how we can practically help if we also factor in the pressure from the general economic downturn and the increase in online shopping and trading. Those were also factors.

Mr Wilson: The Member has made a very important point, and this is the problem with any relief scheme. First, we have to establish what other factors, aside from the public disorder, might have created the problem. Of course, the effect has been patchy. I notice from some of the reports that, even in Belfast city centre, some traders said that they had had a much better Christmas than in previous years, even in the middle of a recession. It is about identifying those who were genuinely hurt and hit by the disorder and disruption and ascertaining what support, if any, can be given to them. The one thing that we cannot do is simply throw bucket-loads of public money at a problem

that, for some traders, might not have existed at all. We also cannot give an unfair advantage to some who might fall within the scope of the scheme while others who were equally badly hit do not fall within its scope because it is badly designed.

Mrs Cochrane: Does the Minister agree that the DUP's refusal to include a clear policy on flags and emblems as part of the cohesion, sharing and integration (CSI) strategy has contributed to the serious situation that businesses have found themselves in?

Mr Wilson: First, if Alliance Party Members want to make themselves relevant, it might be useful if they ask supplementary questions that are relevant to the original question and, secondly, where there are opportunities to discuss the CSI strategy, that they would actually attend the meetings. It is a bit difficult to take lectures on the CSI strategy from someone who is totally, to use a word that seems to be bandied around the political arena quite frequently at the moment, "disengaged" from that strategy.

Mrs Overend: Will the Minister consider a rate reduction for those businesses that can demonstrate they suffered a downturn because of the flag protest?

Mr Wilson: First, a rate reduction would have to be applied on the basis of a consistent policy. We have done that, for example, for small businesses. If we are going to have a policy like that there have to be clear criteria.

Look at the language the Member used — those who have been adversely affected by the protests. How do we ascertain how much a business has been adversely affected? As Mr McLaughlin pointed out, that adverse impact could be part of the general downturn in trade or changing trade patterns. It could also be part of the deterioration of a particular section of the city, like an arterial route or something like that. Before we start to apply things like a rate reduction, all those factors need to be considered. To draw up a policy of that nature — it would have to be a consistent policy — would require consultation, etc, and would not provide immediate relief for any of those businesses. Of course, we would also have to take certain statutory steps to get the kind of solution the Member has suggested.

Peace III Projects

2. **Mr Cree** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the cross-community split on projects being funded under Peace III to date. (AQO 3123/11-15)

Mr Wilson: EU funding is allocated on the basis of the quality of the funding applications received and not really on their source. Applications have to be assessed against agreed selection criteria that reflect the programme's aims and objectives. No shares can be set aside for particular communities. The one thing that I would say, however, is that we do monitor where the money goes, not because we have an obligation to make sure that it is shared out on a certain basis but because we really want to know whether any particular parts of the community are not benefiting.

In May 2011, its most recent survey, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency undertook a community uptake analysis for the Peace III programme. At that time, it was estimated that 54% of the money allocated benefited the Catholic community and 46% the Protestant community.

Mr Cree: I thank the Minister for his response. It is certainly not an issue that affects any particular section of the community; but can any more be done to encourage the development of projects from the complete community?

Mr Wilson: I am glad that the Member has asked the question in the way that he has. This money is called a peace fund and is not designed to sectionalise pockets of the population but to bring the population together. In light of what has happened in the past weeks and in pockets of places over the past year, some people would question its effectiveness in delivering on some of those peace objectives. The Special EU Programmes Body seeks to encourage widespread applications from a range of groups. It advises them on how to succeed in those applications and how to build up capacity where it is lacking, and I believe that that work has to continue.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that it is more important that, regardless of their origins, projects that are selected for funding meet the criteria set, have merit, are sustainable and contribute to community cohesion and development?

Mr Wilson: I do, and, in fact, that is the point that I made. Unfortunately, I have to say to the Member that it is very often his party that raises the issue of the community balance of employment, of where investment projects go and of where government money goes. It is pleasant to hear that there may be some conversion on the SDLP's part because it has, in the past, been the party that has most demanded breakdowns of all kinds of government activity between the Catholic community and the unionist community. As far as I am concerned, when it comes to the distribution of government money, and when it comes to employment and a whole range of things, decisions should be based on merit and not community affiliation.

Mr Campbell: Will the Minister outline how much Peace III money has gone to victims' groups? In doing so, will he highlight and elaborate somewhat on the necessity to ensure that any future funding from here on in is seen to benefit genuine victims of past terrorism?

Mr Wilson: To date, £12.9 million has been awarded to projects that deal with victim or survivors' groups. In addition, £3.9 million has been awarded to projects that include victims or survivors as a specific, named target group. Obviously, we are coming to the end of the current Peace III money. There may be a Peace IV; we do not know. There will be significant consultation on that. I would certainly like to see a greater balance of the money that is available under Peace III going to those who have been victims of the terrorism that we suffered over the 40 years. I believe that those people need support, given the trauma and the difficulties that they have gone through as a result of actions inflicted on them that they did not invite.

Fiscal Balance Report

3. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline how the Treasury's total expenditure on services framework is employed to calculate the total expenditure associated within the 'Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11' published by his Department in November 2012. (AQO 3124/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As outlined in annex c of the report, total expenditure on services comprises two components.

The first is identifiable expenditure and the second is non-identifiable expenditure. As its very name indicates, identifiable expenditure is money that is clearly attributable to Northern Ireland. It is published by the Treasury in its 'Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses'. The non-identifiable expenditure is that which is undertaken for the United Kingdom as a whole and then apportioned to Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. That would be, for example, money that is spent on defence, money that is spent on interest on public sector debt and money that is spent on foreign aid, etc. Of course, there are estimates done on how much is attributable to Northern Ireland expenditure.

3.15 pm

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for the reply. Can I take it that money has been allocated to the Assembly but is then drawn back and used by Westminster? Does that mean, or does the Minister agree, that aspects of expenditure in the total expenditure serve as a framework, which the Executive have very little say over? The Departments actually have little or no say. It is allocated to the Assembly in the block grant, but is then drawn back again, with little or no input from the Assembly.

Mr Wilson: No, that is not the case. The money that is allocated in the block grant is that identifiable expenditure and, on top of that, the annually managed expenditure — that is, money that comes for social security, etc. That money comes to Northern Ireland, it is given to the Executive, the Executive vote on how it is spent, and it is not taken back by Westminster in any way. However, there is other UK-wide expenditure that is never allocated to Northern Ireland. It is simply UK-wide expenditure. To give a full picture of the resources that have been spent by the Government in relation to people in various parts of the United Kingdom, part of that expenditure is then attributed to Northern Ireland. Sometimes it is done on a population basis, sometimes it is done on the gross value added basis, or maybe on the basis of consumption, but the Government simply make an estimate. Northern Ireland benefits from the fact that we have an army and we have defence expenditure. We, as citizens of Northern Ireland, benefit from that. We have benefited in the past from borrowing that has been used for capital expenditure. However, there is interest to be paid on that borrowing, and there are costs for the army. When the Government look at the total amount of money, they attribute part of that to Northern Ireland, and that is the non-identifiable expenditure. It is an estimate but, nevertheless, provided that you use consistent methods across regions and across time, it should give an accurate picture.

Mrs Dobson: I believe that the net fiscal balance report only provides an overview of Northern Ireland's public sector finances. Can the Minister usefully use the corporation tax estimates that are in the report?

Mr Wilson: We can, in so far as the estimates are, first of all, done on the basis of the normal method of compiling those statistics. Secondly, in our negotiations with the Treasury, there is the notional figure of what is raised, because not all of it is clearly identifiable in Northern Ireland. For example, companies that are based in England but earn profit in Northern Ireland may declare that profit in England, etc, so there is some drilling down work to be done there.

Of course, when it comes to the total impact of devolving corporation tax, we have thrown in other factors, such as the secondary impacts if, for example, as a result of reducing corporation tax in Northern Ireland, other taxes were gathered. We believe that that is part of the benefit of devolving corporation tax. Therefore, there is the basic figure of how much is collected, then there is the adding in or subtracting for some of the things that may not be immediately available in those estimates, and then the consideration of what other secondary impacts there might be. When we put all that together, that is where the haggling with Westminster occurs about what the total requirement should be for us in paying for the devolution of corporation tax.

Mr Rogers: Does the Minister have a breakdown of the non-identifiable expenditure for Northern Ireland?

Mr Wilson: I do. I could read it out to the Member, but I will give him some of the information. The biggest non-identifiable expenditure is on debt interest, which is £1.276 billion. The second biggest is defence, which amounts to £1.12 billion. The list goes on and includes international services, public and common services, EU transactions, public order and safety, social protection and recreation, culture and religion. There is a whole range of them there. Non-identifiable expenditure amounts in total to £3.217 billion.

Pensions Legislation

4. **Mr McGimpsey** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what impact the Westminster pensions Bill will have on the Executive's decision to promote their own pensions Bill. (AQO 3125/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Westminster Public Service Pensions Bill is designed to give effect to the recommendations made by the Independent Public Service Pensions Commission, which were accepted by the coalition Government as the basis for reform of public service pension schemes. The commission recommended that its reforms should be applied on a United Kingdom-wide basis.

Public service pension policy is devolved. In March 2012, the Executive agreed to adopt the pension reform policy in Northern Ireland, the key elements of which replace final salary pension provision with career average pensions and link retirement age to the state pension age. So, the Executive have already agreed to the implementation of the principles of the Bill. However, because it is a devolved issue, and because we decided not to attach ourselves to the legislation that is going through Westminster, we have to take the legislation through the Assembly.

Mr McGimpsey: I am concerned about the implications for financial sanctions if we do not hit the time frame that the Minister is looking for. Can he shed any light on where we are as far as the time frame is concerned and on possible financial sanctions if we do not meet it?

Mr Wilson: The Member is right to be concerned about the financial sanctions. The Treasury Minister has already made it quite clear that he will not give us an exemption. If they are going to go through the pain of pension reform in the rest of the United Kingdom, there is no intention to give Northern Ireland a bye-ball on this issue.

The cost has already been estimated. If we made no change and carried the current liabilities that we have for pensions in Northern Ireland while they had been reformed

in the rest of the United Kingdom, the cost would be about £270 million a year. The Treasury has made it quite clear that on a rolling basis, month-by-month or even day-by-day, for every day's delay, there will be an imposition on the block grant for the difference in the pension liability. So, it is important, as the Member has said, that we abide by the timetable and introduce the legislation on time.

As a result of some of the work that I have done, I hope that, despite the fact that the Assembly did not take the easy way of attaching itself to Westminster legislation, we still can get Royal Assent in time for this to be done. Nevertheless, I must issue a warning. That means that there cannot be any play-acting with this. The Committee for Finance and Personnel, which has given its commitment, cannot delay the deliberations on this matter. There can be no delay in the Assembly or in the Executive in getting the Bill out for consultation. When it comes to the regulations, it is important that the four or five different Ministers who are involved do not cause any delays once the primary legislation has been established.

Mr McElduff: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. Does the Minister agree that whatever approach is applied in this region to pensions, we must recognise that the incidence of poverty, especially fuel poverty, must be addressed for our pensioner population?

Mr Wilson: That is a totally separate issue from the level of pensions and the pensions legislation. Of course, there needs to be a means by which we address the whole issue of fuel poverty. The Department for Social Development has a role to play, as does the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. I was pleased to announce Northern Ireland's exemption from the carbon price floor here today when we discussed the autumn statement. I raise the issue only because the Member was not here when I made my statement. However, I suppose the only person in the Assembly who will not be pleased about the announcement of Northern Ireland being exempt from the carbon price floor will be the Member for the Green Party, who sits here in the corner. As a result of that exemption, the potential for a 15% rise in electricity prices in Northern Ireland has been avoided.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answers. How will those in a final salary pension scheme be compensated in the move to a career average scheme?

Mr Wilson: There are transitional protections for people who are in final salary pension schemes. People have jumped up and down about pension reform, but thought has been given to how people who have made contributions and expect certain final salary pensions will be protected. One provision concerns members who are within 10 years of the existing normal pension age on 1 April 2012. Those groups will remain in the existing schemes, and those within a further three or four years of normal pension age will have the option to delay transition to the new scheme. So there is protection for people who have made substantial contributions over their working lives and expect a final salary pension arrangement. As I said, that protection will be there for those within 14 years of retiring at normal pension age.

Prompt Payment

5. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what measures are being put in place to ensure prompt

payment to subcontractors and suppliers by the main contractor working on public and private sector contracts. (AQO 3126/11-15)

Mr Wilson: For public sector contracts, Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) guidance includes a number of measures aimed at ensuring prompt payment to subcontractors. Those include payments by main contractors to be made within 30 days; monthly reporting by main contractors on payment progress where the subcontract value exceeds 1% of the total contract or £10,000; payment issues to be a standing agenda item for project meetings; random checking by project managers to ensure that subcontractors have been paid the money due them; and, ultimately, exclusion of contractors from tender opportunities for up to a year if they do not comply with contract conditions relating to prompt payment.

Mr Dunne: I thank the Minister for his answer. What steps are being taken to prevent acceptance of subeconomic or abnormally low tenders?

Mr Wilson: The 2006 public procurement regulations allow contracting authorities to set aside a tender if they believe it is abnormally low and could not be delivered at the price at which it is offered. CPD is developing guidance for centres of procurement excellence for contracts below the EU thresholds and will employ a formula to identify and exclude such bids. There is no point in our appointing a contractor knowing full well that the price is so risky that the contractor will go bust during the contract, and we will be left trying to get someone to finish the contract, or, because of the low contract price, the contractor tries to squeeze subcontractors to make sure that he can work within the contract price. For those reasons, subeconomic contracts need to be, and will be, looked at very closely.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his work in this regard. Will he outline the measures that he is proposing? What methodology will be used to monitor those to make sure that they are delivering? As chair of the all-party group on construction, I suggest that they are very welcome. Many representative bodies have advocated the very measures that the Minister proposes.

Mr Wilson: First, I will talk about the existing measures. I will also talk about one measure that I did not mention because I thought that there may have been a supplementary question on it. With regard to existing measures, it is up to project managers. A project manager plays an important part in looking at the bills, examining whether they have been paid and, if not, asking the main contractor why not. If the main contractor is breaching the terms of a contract, a project manager ensures that those breaches are reported so that sanctions can be imposed. Ultimately, the sanction will be that the main contractor can be excluded from public sector projects.

3.30 pm

The measure that the Member is asking about is one that he has advocated — I thank him for some of the suggestions that he has made on this — namely the introduction of project bank accounts, which will start for CPD-awarded contracts worth over £1 million to the construction industry from January onwards. We are working with the banks to devise the mechanism that is required. Staff are being trained in the application

of the project bank accounts. It is my hope that, as a result, we will find a way of stopping main contractors using subcontractors as a bank. The idea is that, once the money has been paid into a project bank account, subcontractors with a legitimate claim should be paid within five days. I think that a number of subcontractors who currently find themselves in great difficulty will welcome that.

As far as the private sector is concerned, we changed the Contracts Act to make arbitration much easier and much less costly. For those involved in the private sector who do not have the kind of protection that I mentioned, we have hopefully eased the path for them to ensure that they get paid on time too.

Question for Urgent Oral Answer

Social Development

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Written Ministerial Statement

Mr Speaker: Mr Mark Durkan has given notice of a question for urgent oral answer to the Minister for Social Development. I remind Members that, if they wish to ask a supplementary question, they should do so by continually rising in their place, as they do normally at Question Time. I know that I continually remind Members of the convention and procedure, but I believe that I will have to continue to do so until they learn the lesson. The Member who tabled the question will be called automatically to ask a supplementary. I will then call other Members who are on their feet to ask a supplementary, taking account of the same issues as I do at Question Time.

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development why he chose to make a written statement on an issue as important as the outcome of the review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive rather than making an oral statement in the House.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The statement was about advising Members of the start of a process. Having given careful consideration to the type of statement to use, I elected on this occasion to use the written ministerial statement route to advise Members of the start of a process of discussion and deliberation.

I have set the high-level vision for the new structures to underpin social housing delivery as we move forward. However, these proposals need to be explored further to provide detail on those structures and to reach agreement and consensus. I believe that it was critical to move a debate about future housing structures forward so that we can move on from considering what we need to achieve to work together on designing the structures that will reach the goal of a sustainable housing model that delivers for tenants and the taxpayer and can support both the improvement and delivery of new social housing.

A detailed programme of work will now begin that will involve engagement with key stakeholders. Principal among those are the Housing Executive — I plan to meet the Housing Executive board on Wednesday — the Committee for Social Development, which I have offered to meet on Thursday, and, of course, tenants, staff and their representatives. As I said, the engagement process will commence with a meeting with the board on Wednesday and with the arrangements to meet the Committee for Social Development on Thursday, and it will proceed from there.

It has always been my intention to come to the Chamber to give oral statements once the process is advanced and there is something more substantive to discuss. Because of the nature of the initial statement, I deemed the written statement to be the most appropriate approach on this occasion.

Mr Durkan: I thank the Minister for his answer. The SDLP is not the only party to have expressed concern at the manner in which the original statement was made. Indeed, you, Mr Speaker, advised that on a matter of such public importance as the future of the Northern Ireland Housing

Executive an oral statement to the House might have been more appropriate.

I welcome the Minister's intention to present proposals to the Social Development Committee and have further engagement on his proposals, but in the absence of him taking questions to date speculation has been rife among tenants, other taxpayers and not least among staff about what the proposals will mean for them.

Mr Speaker: I ask the Member to come to his question.

Mr Durkan: OK, Mr Speaker. What assurances, if any, or words of comfort can the Minister give to Housing Executive staff concerned about their future at this time?

Mr McCausland: I certainly concur with the Member that there has been speculation. Indeed, on one online news site, there was extensive speculation even before I had made the statement and a detailed analysis of what I was going to say, much of which was seriously misinformed. So, the issue of speculation is one that I acknowledge.

The statement has set out the general path of travel. The detail of that has yet to be worked out, and I emphasise that point again. The Member asked whether there will be issues regarding staff. Understandably, many staff are concerned following the announcement of the proposals for social housing. Whenever there is change, in any scenario, people have concerns about how it will ultimately develop. Let me stress that this is not about cutting jobs or saving money. I hope that Members, when I have given that categorical assurance, will acknowledge that and carry that message out to the wider community. It is about getting the right structure for social housing in Northern Ireland as we move forward. The functions that are currently carried out by the Housing Executive will still have to be carried out. Grants will still have to be awarded, and properties will still have to be managed. All of those different functions will still take place, and that will require staff. This is not about cutting staff, and it is not about saving money. I trust that the Member will take my assurance on that and convey that to others when he is speaking to them.

Mr Maskey (The Chairperson of the Committee for Social Development): Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Does he and do you, Mr Speaker, accept that on a matter of such importance and contention in our broader community it would have been better and much more appropriate for the announcement to be made to the Assembly itself? Nothing that the Minister has said by way of explanation takes away from the need to have done that. I ask the Minister to concur with me that, had the announcement been made in the Assembly in an open and transparent way, that would have undermined anybody's willingness or ability, even with regard to concerns that were well founded, for idle speculation. We started off with the potential for a very important announcement and a good opportunity to build more social houses and to build and allocate them on the basis of need. We started that off, but we started off falsely.

Mr Speaker: Will the Member come to his question?

Mr Maskey: I ask the Minister to accept that it would have been much better to come to the House first to make such an important announcement so that there was an open discussion as opposed to leaving it to idle speculation.

Mr McCausland: A judgement was made at the time. There are different views that one could take on it. We are where we are today. Even after issuing the written statement, I found that, when I was being interviewed about it, time and again all I could say in answer to questions was, "Those are things that are still to be discussed. There has to be a lot of consideration, appraisals and business cases. All sorts of things will have to be done. There are two years of work ahead of us". However, I welcome the fact that, as the Member acknowledges, this is a good opportunity for us to improve much of our social housing and to increase the quantity. I have had people in my constituency office in the past number of weeks who live in Housing Executive properties from the 1960s and have issues with damp penetrating through walls. We estimate that at least £1 billion of work needs to be done in the shorter term to bring properties up to standard. If we can do that through this method, that will be for the good of tenants. That has to be our priority.

Mr Campbell: Most people will accept that an announcement of significance and importance that has not been flagged up previously should be announced on the Floor of the Assembly. Does the Minister accept that that is not the case with this announcement because the direction of travel had been flagged up by him to the Social Development Committee? Therefore, one interview by a member of that Committee, who said that it was the first he had heard of it, seems totally nonsensical to many people.

Mr McCausland: I thank the Member for his question. I assume the Member to whom he has referred is not in the Chamber at the moment.

Mr Campbell: No.

Mr McCausland: I am correct about that.

The issue has indeed been flagged up on many occasions and, of course, was first flagged up when my predecessor, Alex Attwood, initiated the very review of the Housing Executive. That work started in the previous Assembly under the previous Minister. As soon as I came into the Department, I agreed that that was the right way to move forward. I have taken it forward, and, at every stage, there has been consultation, discussion and a lot of thinking about how we develop it. I have met the Social Development Committee in the past to speak about it. So, if anybody says that they were surprised, I do not know whether they were sleeping through the meetings, missed a meeting or do not read the newspapers or what, but it certainly should not come as any surprise to anyone. The Member is absolutely right.

Mr Beggs: I thank Mr Durkan for bringing the issue to the House, because it affects not only thousands of staff but tens of thousands of tenants. Will the Minister accept that it is highly unusual that such a significant statement should be made in written format and not brought before the House to give Members the chance to ask questions? Can he advise us if decisions have already been made? It is unusual to decide to close a body without agreeing what will replace it.

Mr McCausland: The first part of the question has already been asked and answered, but I will respond to the second part. It would be wrong for me to predetermine where this will eventually finish and the exact detail of it. All that I have done is set out the road map — the segregation of certain functions as recommended by the consultants

and, indeed, by many other experts in the field of housing. There is a determination and an agreement generally that that is the right direction of travel, but the fine detail of the nature of a number of these things has still to be worked through. There is a lot of work still to be done, and that is why there will have to be engagement with the Social Development Committee. This is a matter that will come before the Committee, and ultimately there will be legislation before the House. There is a tremendous amount of work to be done over the next two years, and it will be a real challenge for the Assembly, the Committee and all stakeholders to make sure that we get the right outcome. The key thing is to keep the focus on the best outcome for tenants and taxpayers.

Mrs Cochrane: Will the Minister agree that not making an oral statement on something so significant has perhaps created unnecessary suspicion around what some of the changes may be, especially given that the statement is ambiguous in places and does not allow questions for clarification? Can he confirm whether the Executive have actually agreed to the proposals, or do some ministerial colleagues still have concerns?

Mr McCausland: The Member used the word "suspicion". There should not be any grounds at all for suspicion, because the pattern of the work and the direction of travel was set out some time ago, and we knew clearly where it was tending towards. In terms of ambiguity, there are certain things where the details have not yet been worked out, and I have made that absolutely clear. That is why certain things are not in the statement. All that is in the statement is a general direction of travel, and, as we do the work and discuss it with the Housing Executive, other experts in the housing field, the Social Development Committee and others, the detail will gradually emerge. The Member describes the statement as ambiguous or having a lack of precision, but, at this stage, without having done all that detailed work, it would be wrong of me to say what the outcome will be. That would mean that all of that work would be nugatory. We would not need to do it because I had predetermined the outcome.

It is essential that we do that work. It will take some time, and it will be detailed work. It will provide a firm evidence base for the details of the final outcome being filled in. The Member who posed the question is a member of the Social Development Committee, and, if the Committee, the Department, I as Minister and others work closely together on this, we will get a good outcome. Housing is such an important issue that it is essential that we get this absolutely right.

3.45 pm

Mr Allister: If the direction of travel includes removing from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive its landlord functions and the transfer of those, in the main, to housing associations, how is that likely to impact on rent levels, given that rents in that sector tend to be higher than executive levels?

Mr McCausland: By way of background, separation of the regional provision from the landlord function has happened elsewhere in the United Kingdom. An example of that is Glasgow, where a landlord function has been separated out.

I am proposing that consideration be given to the development of a new rent policy and to the establishment

of a new social housing rent panel that will operate within that rent policy. A key element of that will, of course, be affordability. Annual rent increases have been a feature of social housing over many years, and the Member will be aware of that. That is necessary to maintain standards, because, without that income, we are not able to maintain the standards of the houses in the Housing Executive's stock of 90,000 properties. It is expected that future rent levels will be better aligned to planned investment and funding requirements.

One thing that I would mention in passing is that, although rent for newer housing association properties tends to be higher, the energy efficiency of the homes is also much higher, and the cost of heating those homes is significantly — very significantly, in many cases — reduced. There is a substantial saving for the tenant in their expenditure on heating their home. So, they will benefit from a more energy-efficient home, hopefully, in the future.

There is also an issue about closer convergence between Housing Executive and housing association rent levels, but over a period of time. As I said, affordability has to be a key issue. I will certainly work with officials to define the policy and the framework within which the new rent advisory panel will work to achieve this. That and many other aspects of this will become clearer over the next period, but the general approach of separating the regional function from the landlord function is now general practice across the United Kingdom.

Mr Agnew: Can the Minister provide an outline of how the accountability structure will work in the new structures with regard to not only his Department holding housing associations to account but tenants' representation, which they currently have with the Housing Executive? Will he guarantee that that will still be in place under the new housing structures?

Mr McCausland: As I said, there are many things in the detail of this that have yet to be worked through. All we have done is set out the general line of travel. The Member is getting into detail here that is beyond what has already been determined. All those other things have still to be worked through and will be worked through. Certainly, as we go about that process, engagement and consultation with tenants will be important.

Mrs D Kelly: All the commentators and analysts could not have been wrong. They read into what the Minister published last week that his actions would result in the abolition of the Housing Executive. There was no denial last week from the Minister. The Minister has said clearly this afternoon that the Housing Executive will remain as a function. We all know why the Housing Executive was created. The Minister also said this afternoon that he was committed to building more public sector housing. Can he explain to the House why he has handed back enough money in the last two monitoring rounds to build 200 houses and create numerous jobs?

Mr Speaker: Order. I have given Members quite a bit of latitude. We are getting into a full-blooded debate around this particular subject. The question was very focused. I have allowed Members some latitude, but I will leave it to the Minister.

Mr McCausland: I am happy to respond to that.

Mrs Kelly sets herself up for an easy answer in that regard. First of all — *[Interruption.]* If she would listen instead of talking so much, she might hear more. Let me say first of all — *[Interruption.]* Again, the Member seems to have some difficulty in listening. First of all, this matter started under my predecessor, a member of her own party. One Alex Attwood, a member of the SDLP, started the review of the Housing Executive. He started it; I have continued the process. The Member did not seem to have any objection when it was Alex Attwood doing it; she did not have any trouble at all then. So, I think that there is something rather partisan about her view on the matter. The second point that I would make is that the middle bit of her question was incoherent. The final point that I would make is this — *[Interruption.]* We could all laugh at the question because it was good for a laugh.

The third point that I would make is about the money being handed back. It is an interesting point. I made a point of bringing in the Housing Executive and the housing associations and saying to them that the money that it was proposed to hand back was unacceptable and that work should be done to reduce that amount. If the Member is going to apportion responsibility in this regard, we allocate the money for the Housing Executive to hand out grants to housing associations to build houses. If there is an issue there, it certainly does not lie with my Department, and the question is where it should be apportioned.

If she knew a bit more about the subject, the Member would be aware that the number of houses being built was actually as anticipated. It was simply the fact that, in part, they were able, for a number of reasons, to acquire that number of houses for a smaller amount of money. I wanted to ensure that, if there was money, it was not handed back and we made sure that it went into the housing sector. A very substantial part of the money that it was initially proposed to hand back was put into the housing sector. So, my oversight of the Housing Executive ensured that we are in a much better position today than we would have been otherwise.

To get back to the core of the Member's point, this all started under my predecessor, a member of the SDLP. I could also point out that, when I sent the proposal around the Executive, the general thrust of the paper received very little criticism from her party colleague. Those core points were accepted. Yes, there were some issues here and there, but the core direction of travel is one that everyone has basically signed up to — because it is the only way of travel, and it has been good practice right across the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. That concludes this item of business. We now return to the —

Mrs McKeivitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Is it in order for a Member sitting on the opposite Benches to take photographs during the debate? Mr Speaker, I ask you to examine the video evidence to establish that. Do you agree that that could be seen as a form of intimidation?

Mr Speaker: It is not in order for any Member or even any member of the public to take photographs in the Chamber without permission. However, I am happy enough to talk to the Member outside the Chamber on the issue, if the Member wants to do that, rather than bring it back to the House.

Executive Committee Business

Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Debate resumed on motion:

That the draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved. — [Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment).]

Mr Agnew: There is wide consensus that plastic bags cause environmental damage as litter and in the harmful impact that their improper disposal can have on wildlife, as well as the visual impact that they have on our towns, cities and rural areas. It may not be so widely known that the production of plastic bags is incredibly damaging. The basis of a plastic bag is petrochemical, and the resultant environmental damage of the end disposal of the plastic bag is, therefore, considerable. They are not recyclable, and even those that are claimed to be biodegradable can still cause damage.

It is clear that the objective of any legislative or policy change should be around behavioural change. We have had voluntary approaches that have brought us so far. Those of us who carried reusable bags back then got funny looks for doing so, and shop assistants thought that you were a bit strange because you carried such bags. Now, an increasing number of reusable bags are branded and are seen to be fashionable, and I suppose that that is to be welcomed if it makes reusable bags more socially acceptable. Some supermarkets have either introduced their own charges or encouraged their staff to ask people whether they really need a plastic bag. In many cases, people will not, but they have been accepting them without thinking for so long that they do so without questioning it.

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

The charge being introduced will move those who have not changed to reusable bags in the right direction. As the Minister outlined, evidence from elsewhere shows an 80% or higher reduction in the use of plastic bags as the result of charges being brought in, and that is welcome. I have heard that, when single-use plastic bags have been scrapped, there has been a greater use of heavier bin liners, but no one has been able to provide me with evidence of that. In his consultation and in his departmental research, did the Minister find any evidence that the volume of plastic bag use or disposal has increased due to the introduction of charges? I have found no evidence of it. As far as I can see, there is no evidence of it, but it is important to put to bed the myth that, somehow, the plastic bag charge leads to worse environmental damage.

I will make a final point. Many of my points have been made by other Members, but I will reiterate what some said: this should not be seen as a revenue raiser. The Finance Minister likes to get the odd jibe in about me when I am not in the Chamber, and it is unfortunate that he is not here when I make this one about him. He seems to have used the plastic bag tax as a smokescreen for cuts in environmental areas by saying that the plastic bag tax will make up the shortfall. That is disingenuous. It is not what the revenue should be used for, and it should certainly not be budgeted as an area where we seek to raise revenue. Ultimately, we want to see the use of plastic bags

diminishing greatly to the extent that any revenue raised will be intangible, and we should not be asking Ministers to factor it into their budgets.

4.00 pm

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank all those who contributed to the debate.

In her opening contribution, Anna Lo, as Chair of the Environment Committee, stressed that we would do this for the right reason, as did Mr Agnew, the Member who has just spoken, in his final point. As I tried to capture in my opening remarks, if we are to ostensibly be a world leader in carbon reduction or to have that aspiration, there is a family of expressions of that ambition, such as renewables, a rigorous climate change Bill, an enhanced waste strategy, all-Ireland recycling and economic opportunities round recyclables. It is across that spectrum that the issue of the carrier bag levy should fit in. It is in that context that, I think, you can say with confidence that we are introducing a carrier bag levy for environmental reasons and because we want to be a government that is for the environment, and demonstrably so, through the family of issues that I have raised. If there is a consequence of revenue, it is a consequence, but it is not the primary purpose.

As Mr Agnew indicated, the ambition is to see a reduction — a very quick reduction — of at least 80% in single-use carrier bags. Evidence, however, indicates that we can go beyond that and that, internationally, the range is between 80% and 84%. We have demonstrated how recycling has begun to turn around in Northern Ireland over the past two decades, especially in the most recent decade, and there is a Programme for Government commitment to a 60% statutory recycling target when it comes to municipal waste. I think that that demonstrates that the ambition of getting beyond 80% should not be beyond our imagination. In that way, we should be able to move to a situation where there is less and less use and a move towards zero use of single-use carrier bags, on the far side of which there is no revenue.

That touches on the point that Mr Dallat raised, Mr Speaker. Apologies, Mr Deputy Speaker. I was looking over my shoulder, but you are up in the Chair now.

[Laughter.] Your point was that we should bury the notion that this is anything other than an environmental initiative and that we should profile that the DOE is the primary environment Ministry and that we are an environment government. You said that that is the approach that we should take, regardless of the revenue consequences.

Let us also acknowledge that in sending out the correct message, as Mr Boylan stated, we are asking people to embark upon a culture change. It is a culture change that we in this part of the world, and people in other parts of the world, have manifestly demonstrated that we are capable of achieving. As I indicated, the recycling of domestic and municipal waste is a world apart from where we were 10 years ago, and we are far removed from where we were a relatively short time ago with regard to smoking cigarettes in public buildings or wearing seat belts. Consequently, in my view, it is within our capability to embrace the change of culture that these regulations and this law invite people to. I say that because we have demonstrated that, while some people cling to the past, as we can see only too visibly in one or two ways on our streets at the moment,

people embrace the future in many other ways. In my view, they will embrace the future with enthusiasm if they are offered the right leadership, and the right leadership is what these regulations are trying to capture. There may be some lessons for others who do not offer that leadership in respect of other matters at this time.

Mr Elliott rightly asked some probing questions about how this stacks up in revenue terms. He rightly pointed out that there are revenue calculations in the Budget 2013-14 and 2014-15 that rely upon the income stream from this proposal. The anticipated revenue in year 1, when the revenue stream is 5p per single-use carrier bag, is a gross figure of £2.3 million. In year 2, when the levy increases to 10p, the anticipated gross figure is a multiple of £2.3 million by two: £4.6 million. In those circumstances, given the revenue requirement that is outlined in the Budget as we move into year 2, budgetary cover will exist, based on the income stream that is anticipated because of the levy.

The anticipated set-up costs, which Mr Elliott also touched on, are £500,000 initially, with an annual budgetary commitment in year 2 and thereafter of in and around £630,000. Did I say £500 million? I meant to say £500,000. I had better correct that very quickly. Ten staff are located in Derry, including four compliance officers. We believe that that, on a rolling basis, is the right staff threshold to manage the introduction of the levy in year 1 and its escalation in respect of costs and the range of bags in year 2 and thereafter. We do not think that that will vary much. Consequently, the income coming into government will be greater as the scheme rolls out compared with the cost to government. The money will go to environmental initiatives and environmental departmental projects. It will not be redirected towards other departmental projects.

I want some of the money to go into community-based environmental initiatives, as I tried to do last year. Money goes from the Department to Environment Link to fund grants for environmental initiatives at a community, voluntary and local level. Last year, we were able to direct significantly more funds into that. Even towards the end of this financial year, when moneys may be released in the Department, I may be able to deploy more money to Environment Link and its grant scheme. If the community gives money, one way or another, to government through a plastic bag levy or a single-use carrier bag levy, some of it should go back to the community from whence it came. That is good policy and good environmental practice. In that way, when you wash through all those figures, you can, as Mr Boylan put it, square the carrier bag circle in respect of financial issues.

Mr Boylan also asked how we had tried to incorporate various retail interests into the implementation of the scheme. Significant dedicated work is ongoing in the run-up to 8 April. There were two consultations; a website has been set up, as I said in my opening remarks; twice to date and twice more, there has been correspondence with the retail industry; a seminar was held on 14 November to which retailers were invited to demonstrate how the scheme would work; there is downloadable material from the government website; and there will be a directly funded communications campaign over the next two weeks.

As I think you will see at teatime, there has been a good media uplift for the profile of the issue, even today. Free media will be an important element in preparing people for the scheme going live. In all those ways, the retail industry

has a higher awareness today than it had heretofore, and that awareness will escalate over the next number of weeks. The retail industry has demonstrated that it is prepared to embrace the initiative. Perhaps because of the experience in the Republic of Ireland and in Wales, conversations to date with the big retailers demonstrate that there is little resistance and that they understand the nature of what will happen.

Mrs Kelly asked whether we had learned anything from the experiences of Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Obviously, my Department has not simply gone off to try to recreate the wheel; it has borrowed from experience in other jurisdictions. Given that the Republic of Ireland and Wales are somewhat in advance of us, we have worked with them to learn best practice. We have worked especially with the Office of the Revenue Commissioners in Dublin, which is responsible for the management of the plastic-bag tax there. So, for example, officials visited Listowel, from where the scheme in the Republic is run, and we have learned about modelling from them. When the scheme was introduced in the South and one retailer demonstrated some resistance to it, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners moved rapidly to show its good authority to have that retailer come into compliance. If that is necessary in the North, I will not be shy about telling officials that if a big retailer shows a lot of resistance, and contrary to what the evidence might have been to date about the scheme, rapid action to ensure early and full compliance will be deployed. However, as with all regulation and enforcement, it has to be proportionate. We will go after the worst offenders and have a light touch against those who are coming into compliance in the early days and months of the scheme.

Mr Allister claimed in rather extravagant language that there is neither rhyme nor reason to what we are proposing. I could say that about quite a number of comments that Mr Allister has made in recent weeks. There was neither rhyme nor reason to those; in fact, there was just a downright lack of reason. Putting that aside, he claimed that the proposal would impose more burden on the retail industry. No, it will not. Why will it not? The scheme of implementation and compliance is modelled to ensure that retailers, be they large or small, will, if possible, have less burden rather than more as a consequence of the proposal.

How will that work? First, returns from retailers would be required quarterly. In the fullness of time, we intend to move to annual returns. Secondly, the way that it will work is consistent and can be integrated into existing stock-recording arrangements. Thirdly, as a consequence of the carrier-bag levy, retailers, small and large, will not have to do the ordering, purchasing, distribution or any of the other responsibilities that attach to the acquisition, sale or use of carrier bags. So, in the round, given that the scheme is modelled to accommodate small and large retailers in how often returns have to be submitted — they can be submitted online and can be done as part of and integrated into current recording arrangements — the swings and roundabouts in the scheme will result in those retailers having not an undue burden but a good contribution to make to environmental protection.

Mr Allister also asked whether we assessed the number of jobs that would be lost to those who manufacture bags in Northern Ireland. Yes, we did. As Mr Allister would know, as a person of the law, that we have obligations to carry

out impact assessments for new law and policy. What did we discover on the far side of making those impact assessments after looking at business in the North and acquiring information from good authorities, including DETI, about the business of manufacturing plastic and other types of bags in Northern Ireland? We discovered that the impact in terms of the number of jobs that could be lost was 10. So, yes, we looked at that because we were legally obliged to do so and because it was appropriate that we did so to protect jobs going forward. The outcome was that 10 jobs were potentially at risk. However, in my view, the potential gain in environmental protection means that it is worth pursuing the levy, mindful that we should be concerned about any job losses, even 10. I think that the net gain from sending out the message that Northern Ireland is green and clean, is a world leader in carbon reduction, and is up for recycling renewables and reducing single-use carrier bags is far in excess of the net loss of fewer jobs.

4.15 pm

Mr Allister: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Attwood: I will in just one second, when I finish my commentary on what you said.

Mr Allister said that there was a tension in the proposals as drafted because biodegradable bags are subject to the levy and are not exempt. He asked whether there was essentially a contradiction — I may be putting this even more eloquently than Mr Allister did — between, on the one hand, going for a green initiative and, on the other hand, charging for biodegradable bags. In that regard, I refer to something that Stephen Agnew said. He said that you need to be careful about claims that bags are biodegradable, and he is right to issue that caution. That which is claimed to be biodegradable, in itself, deserves some interrogation. In any case, biodegradable bags take time to degrade. They are not like something from 'Mission Impossible' — "The tape will destruct in five seconds". Such bags do not destruct instantly; they take time, and during that time, they can create an environmental impact.

In any case, it misses the point because, as Mr Agnew inevitably argued, there are costs even for biodegradable bags because of the character of production, transport and distribution. Even that, in my view, misses the point. The point is that we have European and domestic requirements to try to reduce packaging generally. This month, more rigorous targets have been set for the reduction of packaging generally in Northern Ireland in order to send out the message that, whether it is plastic, paper or other types of bags, and whether it is because of European requirements or our own domestic challenge, we will stretch ourselves more and more to try to live up to the requirements to reduce packaging.

I will take Mr Allister's point now.

Mr Allister: I note the Minister's enthusiasm about destroying jobs, even though it is 10 jobs, and that works through to a certain reality. Some in the bag manufacturing industry are very small operators. I can think of one small manufacturer in the Ballymena area to whom I have spoken and who primarily produces paper bags. He is appalled and astounded that what was represented as the plastic bag tax is effectively going to put him out of business, even though he produces a

biodegradable product. I really think that the Minister has lost the run of himself if he thinks that he is serving some greater environmental goal by coming down as hard on biodegradable products as he is on plastic products.

Mr Attwood: Again, I urge Mr Allister to interrogate, as he might be inclined to do in another life, what this law actually says. It will say that single-use carrier bags are captured, as will be lower-priced biodegradable bags. Why? It is in order to reduce the overall scale of bag use. That is the purpose. Higher-priced biodegradable or multi-use bags will clearly not be captured. That is the message that we should send out. People should be encouraged, on the one hand, to use biodegradable and, on the other hand, to use multi-use biodegradable bags and other multi-use bags. That is the purpose and ambition of the legislation. That is good green politics, good green agenda and good green business, and it is good for the green environment. That is the point that I am trying to make.

I did not say that I welcome destroying jobs. I said that there was a net gain around all this, noting that there would be some loss of jobs — the net gain being for the profile of Northern Ireland as green and clean, in asserting our renewables credentials, for saying that we embrace the green agenda and the green opportunities around that, in particular when it comes to recycling, especially on the island of Ireland and especially when it comes to plastic and bulky items. In my view, the more we send out that message, far and wide, the more business will grow on this island around green and renewable industry. The gain of that is far and vastly disproportionate to any potential loss of jobs when it comes to the manufacturing of bags in Northern Ireland. If we do not have the imagination to say that there may be some loss of jobs and some pain in the short term, but in the longer term, the economic opportunity of the profile of Northern Ireland as being up for renewables industry, as well as the profile of Northern Ireland as being clean and green, that is short-termism. Although there will be some loss — and there may be loss, I do not know, in the business in Ballymena, and I would like to speak to that gentleman about his particular business and business model — if we cannot see beyond that potential loss and see the potential gain, we are selling our people and the economic opportunities short.

Finally, I turn to the comments made by Steven Agnew. I agree with all that he said, but there was one comment that I took a note of. I just cannot see it now. I will have to come back to you on the second last point you made, which I cannot recall. I will come back to you in writing in respect of that matter.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before we proceed to the Question, I remind Members that cross-community support is required under section 63(3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved (with cross-community support):

That the draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Mr Allister: I did not hear any Ayes. On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Were Ayes called across the House? Certainly, they did not reach, in decibel level, to this end of the House.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am entirely satisfied that the House, apart from yourself, supported the motion.

Committee Business

Single Farm Payments

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

Mr Frew (The Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I beg to move

That this Assembly acknowledges the importance of single farm payments to the farming industry and to the wider rural economy; expresses concern about the issues arising from the inspection and payment system for the 2011 scheme; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that systems for the delivery of the scheme in the future are fit for purpose and that the inspection process is expedited effectively.

Single farm payments are made to approximately 38,000 farming businesses in Northern Ireland and are worth around £300 million to our economy. They are a vital aspect of our overall economy and an essential element in farming life. Ensuring that those payments are made on time and with the minimum of delay and administration is crucial. That is why the Committee recently undertook in-depth scrutiny on the issue. Last winter, and into summer and autumn of 2012, as individual Members, we began to hear about late payments, and, in some cases, extremely late payments, for the 2011 payment year. That concerned us greatly as a Committee. I am sure that all Members, particularly those who serve rural constituencies, can tell similar stories of farmers whose single farm payments still had not arrived by May, June, July or, indeed, into August and September. As constituency MLAS, our focus was on sorting out the problems faced by individuals, but our focus as a Committee was on getting to the bottom of the issue and ensuring that the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) put in place systems to guarantee that it did not happen again.

We commissioned research on the EU legislation governing single farm payments, the use of remote sensing in Wales and the Republic of Ireland and the different timescales in other countries for issuing maps and application forms.

DARD is going through a programme of massive change in its systems for single farm payments. As with any such programme, there are problems. This programme of change is being implemented mainly because of the findings of a number of EU audits. The audits identified a number of errors that led to disallowance. The disallowance issue was the subject of a different debate and a recent ministerial statement to the Assembly, so I do not intend to cover that today.

I want to make it clear that the vast majority of farmers receive their single farm payments in December each year. DARD's target is to make 80% of payments by December, but this is not where the problem lies. The problem is the impact that an inspection can have on the one in 20 farmers who has to undergo it. In 2011, many of those inspected found that their payment was delayed until mid

to late summer. Bear in mind that the ordinary farmer in Northern Ireland expects his payment in December and builds that into his financial planning and cash flow estimates. So finding out that payment is delayed by six months or more can be a severe financial shock. Although the number of those experiencing delay may be small, evidence indicated that the delay can cause significant cash flow problems for those concerned. Delay causes problems gaining credit from banks, making payments to meal and feed companies and affording the price of fuel for machinery. In addition, there are those whose farms are closed because of TB. All these issues can impact greatly on farmers' ability to get themselves out of financial difficulty. It is very important that the single farm payment is drawn down as quickly and efficiently as possible to meet their requirements. It is the economic impact of the delayed payment rather than the number affected that concerns the Committee.

The Committee is very keen that remote sensing be explored and developed. Remote sensing is the use of aerial imagery and/or satellite images to examine land use and is used in many member states as part of the inspection process. It appears that in the Republic of Ireland, the use of this technology has allowed eligibility checks to be completed earlier. Moreover, there is some anecdotal evidence that inspecting by remote sensing is substantially cheaper. So the Committee was pleased that, in 2012, DARD, in a pilot project, undertook 250 inspections by remote sensing. There was considerable discussion about this at Committee, particularly about whether the pilot should have been larger, so I look forward to the Minister's response on its success or otherwise, whether it will be extended in 2013 and what impact it will have on speeding up the payment process. We also hope to hear whether the pilot indicates scope for savings to be made in the administration of single farm payments.

I move now to the application process. Farmers have to receive and complete an application form for a single farm payment that is based on land eligibility and the entitlement maps. This normally happens around mid-March each year. In 2011, one of the main reasons for the delay in payments, particularly in inspection cases, was the delay in getting this information out to farmers. DARD really struggled with that in 2011. The Committee asked for research on the timescales in other jurisdictions for the issuing of application forms and maps. DARD should give some consideration to getting the forms out sooner, thus enabling the closing date to be brought forward and the inspections to begin sooner. This would allow more inspections during the longer days and better weather of the summer months.

A simple shift in timescale of two weeks could enable more payments to be made in December, and, importantly, more farmers who were inspected would get a payment in December. When questioned about that, DARD indicated that farmers were used to the closing date in mid-May and might get confused if it were moved. I am not sure that the Committee can accept that as a reasonable, considered and logical rationale for not even considering moving the dates.

4.30 pm

I also want to draw attention to confusion over the rules surrounding single farm payments. No one denies that they are complex. No one denies that since the scheme was launched in 2005, auditing and further information from Brussels has clarified the interpretation of the rules. However, it is clear that there has been considerable confusion in the farming community, particularly around scrub, whin, heather and grazing. DARD noted that advice on the rules was refined after auditing in 2006. That was over six years ago. According to evidence given to the Committee, confusion still exists. The fact that there is still confusion six years later means that, in some way, the communication that DARD has had with the farming community has failed in that respect.

The failure in communication also means that the farmer has, generally, every year, accepted the maps that he has been given by DARD as correct. However, if he has been inspected, there may be differences in what he and the DARD inspection process considered eligible or ineligible. For some, that has led to very severe penalties. Anecdotally — many MLAs will back this up — the level of penalties in some cases has wiped out the single farm payments for that year.

That failure in communication does not fill the Committee with any confidence that DARD communication around the next big issue, which is the 2013 maps and boundaries, will be any better. Farmers have accepted that what DARD provides to them is correct. There now appears to be a change in emphasis; DARD says that it is up to the farmer to double-check every aspect of the maps. DARD is putting the onus on the farmer to make sure that he understands and applies the rule. DARD told us that farmers will have to look at and consider the new digital maps very carefully in 2013, particularly around field boundaries and maximum eligible areas.

We know that some farmers are already confused by the new maps, and there have already been negative media reports. We have had media reports, even this week, that suggest that some of the changes and amendments that have been made over recent years have not been recorded on the new digital maps, hence putting farmers back years in that process. DARD must ensure that the fiasco of 2011 is not repeated in 2013. The farming industry cannot sustain another hit like that of 2011. Lessons must be learnt, and sufficient resources, people, and IT and other systems must be fit for purpose. Relevant DARD staff must be trained and able to answer farmers' queries. That is why we need firm assurances from the Minister today that the systems in place for future schemes, particularly the 2013 payment year, are fit for purpose and that the problems associated with late inspections can be addressed. If we get our house in order with regard to remote sensing, it may well open the door for advance payments to farmers much earlier than December. DARD should strive to at least have the capacity from Europe to be able to do that.

Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you very much for the time given to me today. I hope that this is a very useful debate, and I hope that the Minister takes something out of it.

Mr McMullan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The single farm payment scheme in the Six Counties is vital for cash flow in the farming industry. The

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is just one of 80 accredited paying agencies in the European Union. Each year, the Department pays out in the region of £300 million to the agriculture industry under the single farm payment scheme.

The importance of the scheme is wide-ranging, and it benefits communities in different ways. The money is spent on education, machinery, vehicles, fuel, agricultural contractors, employment, local shops, and so on. At present, the industry is one of the top employers directly and indirectly. Therefore, if the payments fail, the effect on local communities could be devastating.

Another benefit for the farming industry that is funded directly from the single farm payment scheme is the rural development programme. A percentage of all single farm payments is deducted, and that goes towards the rural development scheme. For example, the recent call for applications to tranche 3 of the farm modernisation programme, which is funded under axis 1 of the rural development programme, has allowed 2,500 applicants to receive letters of offer totalling £7 million. When combined with match funding from the farming community, that will equate to a total investment in the rural economy under tranche 3 of around £13.75 million.

As the Minister pointed out, the Commission's auditors raised concerns about our mapping system and inspection process. That was mainly due to staff availability, more detailed ineligible features and the new IT system. A further reason for slower inspections was the level and detail of training for new staff. A total of 37,860 potentially eligible applications were submitted under the 2011 scheme and on-farm checks were carried out on nearly 1,900 farm businesses.

A further reason for slower progress in inspections was the level of detail inspectors were required to record in order to ensure that ineligible features are not included for payment. During that process, some 66,000 fields were inspected, with many requiring changes. Some 100,000 changes were recorded by inspectors, which required DARD to edit the maps. The changes in ineligible features included buildings, yards, scrub and swamp areas. Up to 85% of all changes identified during the 2011 inspection process related to features present from 2005 and earlier. Access to the applications proved to be highly complex, and adding to the time taken were the claims that were made by other farmers on the same land to support their single farm payment claims in other years.

The Minister has put in place new systems to speed up the process of inspections and allow for faster payments. It is worth mentioning that EU rules allowed the Department to begin to make payments in December 2011 and required at least 95.24% of the value of 2011 claims to be paid out by 30 June 2012. That target was met.

Delays in payments in 2011 led to some farm businesses being refused bank overdrafts, which, in turn, led to farmers having to sell stock to pay household bills, feed bills, education bills, fuel bills, etc. In some cases, the stock that farmers were forced to sell was not at a finished standard and did not receive the full market value.

The Minister was asked to consider making part payments to farmers whose inspections have taken longer, but that is not possible under EU rules. All inspections have to be carried out before any payments are made.

The Minister met the local banks to update them on the progress of finalising the 2011 single farm payment cases. She made the banks aware of the financial problems faced by farmers whose inspections have taken longer to process, and asked them to consider that when clients contacted them.

For the future, remote sensing that uses satellite imagery to undertake remote inspections can be followed up by rapid field inspections by staff. They can then inspect discrepancies in particular fields without having to visit entire farms.

Inspections for the 2012 scheme started on 21 May 2012, which was four weeks earlier than in 2011. That will allow a longer time to complete inspections and lead to quicker payments. The number of inspection staff has increased, and around 600 inspection claims were finalised for payment by 9 January, which is five times more than the same time last year.

The problems in 2011 are recognised by all. In the Minister's statement of 26 November 2012, she acknowledged that the —

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

Mr McMullan: — delays in making payments to farm businesses that had a farm inspection were too long. She also outlined the changes that her Department is making to ensure that more inspection cases are paid sooner. I support the motion.

Mrs Dobson: I very much welcome the opportunity to speak on this Committee motion because of its importance to all sections of our local economy. I declare an interest as my husband receives a single farm payment.

More than ever, the single farm payment forms an incredibly important element on the balance sheet of each and every farm business across Northern Ireland. In recent years, its significance for farmers has become even more important given the present economic climate. The economic reality for our farmers is that many could simply not survive without that payment. Without it, businesses across Northern Ireland would simply go under. Rural communities and local businesses — small and large — all benefit from the payment, which filters down through all our local and rural economies. The myth that this funding remains in farmers' pockets is wholly untrue. Bills are paid, equipment bought and preparations made on the farm for the coming year. Therefore, it follows that getting this payment to claimants in a timely and efficient manner is of critical importance to everyone in Northern Ireland. However, I am not aware of any farmer who would ever describe the current process as "timely" or "efficient".

I have lost count of the number of farmers, and I am sure that each and every Member can give similar examples, who have contacted my constituency office in recent weeks because of the impact of not receiving their payment. A month without the payment can put a spanner in the works of the farm planning for the entire year. The hands of the farmers are tied, and their annoyance is further increased by the lack of information provided to them by the Department. I am sure that for all those farmers who contact our offices or the Department directly, there are equal numbers who suffer in silence.

I, therefore, challenge the Minister on the response times taken by her Department when assessing cases; response times that last year led to payments not being made until July or August. The Minister told me in recent correspondence that her Department has:

“no discretion to vary the rules detailed by the European Council legislation”.

Surely, she would acknowledge that, in implementing these rules, her Department has a duty to put farmers first and not the Department. All too often, farmers are placed at the mercy of the DARD bureaucratic machine; a machine that, for many, grinds far too slowly and often appears to work against rather than with the farmers.

The Minister has told me that, as a result of improvements, she “expects” to pay more inspection cases at an earlier stage this year. If, as claimed, the inspection and payment systems have been improved, that should be a guarantee and not an expectation. Therefore, I would welcome the Minister’s clarification on that point. She must also tell us here today when she will finally be in a position to seek approval from the EU Commission for single farm payments to be made in advance. That should already be in place, and its absence is a blight on each and every farming family across Northern Ireland.

The Department’s primary reason for existence should be to protect and grow Northern Ireland’s agricultural industry. However, the administration of last year’s payments was nothing short of a disaster. It was fundamentally unacceptable that farmers were made to wait well into the summer months before receiving their payments. A crucial area of cash flow should never be tied up for so long by sheer departmental bureaucracy. It appears that not one person has been or will be held to account, but farmers are left to count the cost. We all know that 2012 was an extremely difficult time for the industry; a year that was made even harder by withheld payments. It is my hope that 2013 will herald new growth for the industry. Farmers will look to the Minister to deliver for them, to cut away the bureaucracy and to finally, once and for all, put farmers first.

Mr Rogers: I support the motion and commend the Committee for bringing it to the House. Prompt payment of single farm payments is key to keeping Northern Ireland’s largest industry buoyant in the present economic circumstances. An overly cumbersome inspection process that results in many cases of late and/or reduced payments causes havoc with cash flow. It has to be said at the outset that no one in any way condones fraudulent activity, but when farmers are doing their best to follow DARD guidelines and there are problems year on year, there is fault somewhere. However, the farmer always becomes the fall guy.

4.45 pm

December is a big payout time in a farmer’s calendar. It is not so much about Christmas but getting all the bills paid, including conacre. I know many farmers who are unable to finish their stock because they simply cannot afford to. Even the weather has contributed to the cash flow problems. Poor quality feed has to be supplemented with bought-in feedstuffs to keep the milk yield up. Farmers have to contend with all this and decreasing overdraft facilities, even if they are lucky and the single farm payment cheque drops through the letter box in

December. However, problems really arise when a farmer is pulled out for inspection. In 2011, many farmers in that category waited for three months for an inspection report on which they could comment, and the end result, whether three months or six months later, was a late payment at best, or, in some cases, a reduced payment. You can only imagine the impact on a farmer and his family when they are unable to meet their banking commitments for an additional six months, but, meanwhile, life on the farm has to continue. It is like saying to a salaried person that we are having some problems calculating their salary this month, but we will sort them out within a few months.

Late payments are an increasing problem, ranging from 450 in 2009 to over 1,200 in 2011. As other Members said, we are not talking about just weeks; it can be months, and six months in many cases. It must be the favourite topic of ministerial questions. What I would like to hear from the Minister is this: how many of the 600 late payments chosen for further scrutiny were solely the fault of the Department?

As other Members mentioned, there were many issues with mapping recently. The Minister and the Department place great emphasis on farmers checking their new maps. I cannot disagree with them at all, but I come from a different angle because, over the past few days, one landowner expressed concern to me that the new map from the Department completely removed part of his holding and transferred it to an area that is publicly controlled. Given the modern map technology and with fully trained officials reading the maps, how can the Department be so wrong? I call on all farmers to double-check their maps.

On penalties, I find it hard to accept that if a farmer makes the slightest error, he can have the book thrown at him, and it costs him his single farm payment for up to three years. On the other hand, the Department said:

“we will continue to make mistakes in this complicated system that we operate”.

They do so without any fear of redress. Have there been significant changes in the regulations since 2005 or has DARD misinterpreted the original regulations?

Minister, I welcome your commitment to reducing the regulatory burden on the farming industry, but when will it happen? Promises are one thing, but farmers want delivery. A page of regulations from Europe becomes a book when the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and DARD get their hands on it. Why, for example, in the rural development programme are the regulations here different from those in Scotland?

I want us to start learning from our mistakes. Farmers and I are less interested in hearing about DARD’s mistakes than about what steps are being taken to ensure that yesterday’s mistakes do not happen today and today’s mistakes do not happen tomorrow. These mistakes cost farmers thousands of pounds.

The Chairman spoke about the greater use of remote sensing technology, provided that the pilot is a success.

Finally, our farmers need an advanced balance payment system like the one for farmers in the Republic. After all, it is the same European money. Advanced payments would help to ameliorate the cash flow crisis. Minister, we need

you to take the case to DEFRA and to Europe. Our farmers deserve the same opportunities as those in the Republic.

Mr McCarthy: First, I declare an interest. I fully support the motion on the Order Paper and concur with everything that our Chairperson and Committee members said in the debate. For many years now, the single farm payment system has played a vital role for the farming industry and contributes greatly to the rural economy. We must express concern and regret at what happened to instigate the heavy disallowance. We support measures to ensure that we get on top of the problem as soon as possible, once and for all, and ensure that such events are not repeated.

I appreciate that the Minister and her Department have been working hard to find answers and put in place measures for the smooth distribution of all moneys from the single farm payment fund and to ensure that our farmers do not have to wait for long periods to receive what is their entitlement. As other Members said, we are fully aware of the importance of this money to the farming community. We have witnessed the stress and worry foisted on people in that community because of the delay in their settlement. I also thank all those organisations and groups that gave evidence to the Committee and answered members' questions.

As the Minister advised in her statement on tackling the problem of financial corrections, the Commission was far from content with the mapping systems that we had in place at that time and saw things that were wrong with them. She said that our:

"inspections were not good enough and our approach to sanctions and penalties was too lenient." — [Official Report, Bound Volume 79, p327, col 2].

Something more stringent was needed to ensure that all applications were fair and accurate. That was what was coming from above.

I think that it is fair to say that we all acknowledge that it is essential that everyone, including farmers, has a part to play in getting these things put right. We hope that the on-the-spot inspections and enhanced staff training will contribute towards reaching that goal. Along with remote-sensing technology and satellite imagery, they surely must enable the Department to check out land claimed for.

Of course, human nature being what it is, we are not always excited to see inspectors come on to our farms. However, that must be recognised as part and parcel of the business in which we are all engaged. I welcome the Minister's determination to accelerate payments to farmers, as well as the Department's use of modern technology, which will enable it to have correct details on which the payments are based.

I take this opportunity to thank the Department and the Minister for continuing to use the townland names on all correspondence. It was not so long ago that people living in townlands in rural areas were being ignored. Now, however, the Department is doing what this Assembly asked it to do, which is to record the townland names on all correspondence. That, for me, is also very important.

The Commission was unhappy that the land parcel identification system (LPIS) maps did not identify a maximum eligible area, which is the eligible land in any one field for which a single farm payment can be claimed.

The new maps are being issued. Although some Members criticised this, there is certainly an onus on the farmer to make sure that all the boundaries are correct and that areas within those boundaries in which a claim can be made are eligible. However, ensuring that is in everyone's interest, as it would avoid unnecessary delay in the farmers' payments.

I thank the Committee staff for the assistance that they have given to the Committee in this work. I particularly thank our research officer, Mark Allen, for his work on this very important issue. He highlighted very useful information on the origins of the single farm payment and timings, as well as on the use of remote sensing in these islands, which lets us compare activities between the regions.

In conclusion, in my opinion, our Committee has played its part by asking pertinent questions on all aspects of the single farm payment scheme.

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

Mr McCarthy: We heard about the problems that farmers have had with all aspects of the single farm payment.

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

Mr McCarthy: I think that the Minister and her Department have listened, and I hope that we can overcome the problems.

Mr Irwin: I declare an interest as a farmer who receives a single farm payment. As such, I am, therefore, very aware of the issues that surround the delivery of the payments.

I receive scores of representations from farmers every year about the time that it takes the Department to get the payments processed. I refer to that regularly in the farming press. The time that elapses between a farm inspection taking place and a payment being made to the farmer is excessive and can sometimes be between eight and 12 months.

I accept that the Department gets 80% of the payments out on time, which is very good, but 20% of farmers who undergo inspections have experienced long delays, especially in 2011-12. Although it sounds good that 80% of farmers are paid, leaving 20% to be paid, when you take into account that there are almost 40,000 applications, that 20% means that there could be as many as 8,000 farmers who are still without money at the end of December. However, I accept that inspections started earlier this year — the Department has made every effort to do that — and more headway has been made in that regard.

The single farm payment is a lifeline for the industry. Many farmers simply could not operate without it. I welcome the fact that changes have been implemented in this round of payments and that farmers have received the payments a little faster than in previous years. However, for the remaining 20% of farmers, long delays have really serious consequences. I have spoken to many farmers who are under immense pressure from their local bank. They are being squeezed even tighter by overdraft reductions and fees being slapped on them at the slightest opportunity.

In addition, we are in a very tough and competitive marketplace in which the large retailers are in a price war to see who can offer the cheapest food to the consumer. I have stated publicly that those tactics have an awful

impact on the farmer, who is at the start of the food supply chain. I take this opportunity to again publicly call on the processors and retailers to offer a fair price to our farmers.

In light of this pressure from the banks, it is unfortunate that when a farmer rings the Department to inquire about the progress of their application, they often receive a bland answer stating that it is work in progress and that they cannot be given a definite date on which they will be paid. That does little to keep the banks at bay. I am acutely aware of that, having had conversations with many farmers who find themselves in that very position.

A new mapping system has been introduced, and farmers have received their new maps. The aim of the new mapping system is to speed up the processing of the scheme. However, I am somewhat alarmed that farmers are reporting significant discrepancies with the new maps. It is worrying on a number of fronts, mainly in that a lot of time, money and resources were exhausted in upgrading the system. I am interested to hear the Minister's response on the level of the Department's inaccuracies that she has encountered with the new maps.

There is no doubt that room for improvement exists on the payments issue. Although changes have been made and payments are speeding up, the situation has to improve for the thousands of farmers who are still waiting for their money. I support the motion.

Mr McAleer: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Members who represent rural constituencies will know that, for many people, life revolves around the farm. It is a way of life. This has been a particularly savage year for the local farming industry, with bad weather, poor farm gate prices and the rising cost of feed. As mentioned, the single farm payment is a lifeline for most farmers. They rely on it at the end of the year to make ends meet.

The farmers' plight has been compounded this year by the falling strength of the euro against the pound. Although the exchange rate is set by the European Central Bank and is beyond local control, it has resulted in a reduction of approximately 8% in the single farm payment awarded to farmers who are already under pressure. Overall, that is a £20 million shortfall in the single farm payment from the previous year. It was, therefore, welcome that the Minister recently announced her decision to reduce voluntary modulation, which, in turn, will put an additional €19 million into the pockets of farmers in 2013.

During the year, the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development heard evidence from a wide range of stakeholders. As a member of the Committee, I gained a better appreciation of the scale and challenge of the task facing the Department in processing approximately 38,000 applications that relate to approximately 750,000 individual parcels of land and in meeting the needs of the local farming community within the strict parameters set by the EU guidelines. I have also gleaned a deeper understanding of the difficulties facing the farming community.

As part of this review, we listened to representations from organisations such as NIAPA, the UFU and NIACA. They, along with other stakeholders, should be thanked for taking the time to come and meet or to correspond with the Committee. I want to be identified with the remarks made by Mr McCarthy in thanking the officials and researchers for playing their part in the review and the accompanying motion.

The question of speeding up payments is a recurrent one. Most rurally based MLAs have been contacted by farmers for whom payment has been delayed due to inspections or some other reasons.

I am, however, glad to note that the Department has exceeded its target for this year, with over 80% of payments issued before Christmas. I also welcome the fact that steps have been taken to speed up the inspection process and the consequent issuing of payments. In particular, there has been good progress on the land parcel identification system, along with better training and equipment for field inspectors, and progress has been made on developing and promoting electronic applications.

Another key step taken by the Minister and the Department is the trialling of remote sensing as a control. During the inquiry, we learned from the experiences of Wales and the South of Ireland that that can speed up the inspection process and that it is more cost-effective than carrying out multiple on-field inspections. I note that the Minister has outlined her intention to increase the number of inspections by remote sensing in 2013, and that is to be welcomed.

Farming is the backbone of rural communities. Farmers are experiencing a crisis, largely due to extreme weather conditions and the global economy. I welcome the inquiry and the motion, which acknowledges the centrality of the single farm payment to the farming industry. I therefore encourage the Minister and her Department to continue with the process of developing an effective and efficient system for the delivery of the single farm payment scheme that will see inspections and payments expedited.

5.00 pm

Mr Clarke: Mr Deputy Speaker, you will appreciate that, when you are the eighth person to speak on the subject and we are all singing from the same hymn sheet, it is difficult to know what to say. I have been gathering my thoughts as the debate has gone on, and I do not disagree with any of the Members who have spoken.

The Chairman referred to the importance of the single farm payment, and no one will diminish that. We all appreciate that it is very important, given the economic climate and the financial difficulties that many of our farmers face. That said — I must still be suffering from Christmas spirit — I do not want to play the negative card here. Others may wish to, and I normally do. I have seen the officials in the Officials' Box today. I know that we cannot refer to them directly, but I have to say that I can see the work that they have done. The changes that have been made this year to the payment system have to be welcomed. The Department and the Minister have been listening over the past couple of years, and changes have been made. Nevertheless, we always can expect more.

Two Members referred to 80% of payments being issued by the end of December. On the face of it, we have to welcome that, but we still have to say to the Minister that, although it is only January, we do not want to be talking about the other 20% in July. So it is a pat on the back for the Department in relation to the 80%, but we need an assurance from the Minister that, although the stops have been pulled out in relation to many aspects of the single farm payment, whatever more can be done has to be done. As Members have said, the banks are putting farmers

under immense pressure. This is not even a political debate; it covers all sections of the farming community, regardless of the type of farming practice. All in all, I welcome this.

The other issue is inspections. Work has been done on that, and the Department has listened. However, I listened with interest about the mapping, as it has been criticised in the past. There are already early criticisms of the new system, which worries me, given the investment that we have had over the past number of years and the most recent investment. So, the Minister needs to keep a close eye on what her Department has invested in the mapping system. It is easy to suggest to farmers that it is their responsibility to make sure that the maps are right, but there has been loads of money spent on it, so it is up to those who have been commissioned to do the maps to make sure that they are right and remove some of the responsibility from farmers. All in all, I support the motion.

Mr Kinahan: I am pleased to support the motion. I declare an interest and say that it is my wife and I who receive the single farm payment.

Single farm payments are crucial to farm businesses, particularly given the perfect storm of issues hitting the industry, namely the impact, as others have said, of the weather, rising feed prices and poor farm-gate returns. Every penny is crucial, every single day. A squeeze on cash flow, which is the lifeblood of any business, sector or economy, and increased difficulties in accessing credit are also issues affecting agriculture, and that reinforces the very real need to get single farm payments to claimants as quickly as possible. The effective distribution of about £300 million in payments to farm businesses here means that money very quickly flows through all sectors of the rural economy and beyond. The so-called multiplier effect is when money spent by one business is, in turn, spent by other businesses, stimulating demand and supporting jobs. That financial flow is absolutely vital for the economy, especially as agriculture and agrifood are major parts, as we all know, of the Northern Ireland economy.

DARD's statistics show that agriculture and food and drink processing account for 6.5% of employment here, with great potential for further growth and further job creation. The direct support provided by single farm payments is, indeed, essential to maintain a sustainable supply of quality food for a growing world population. The complexities and imbalances in the fuel food supply chain means that the consumer — everyone — also benefits from the presence of direct support to farmers. We should remember that; it is sometimes forgotten. We are all aware of the issues with the delivery of single farm payments in Northern Ireland, which have resulted in the European Commission clawing back millions in the form of disallowance. It is vital that DARD and the Minister fully get to grips with the issues so that the additional sums are not returned to Europe. That way, money will not be lost from our economy.

I note that DARD exceeded its target to complete around 80% of payments in December 2012 and that inspections commenced several weeks earlier in this cycle. Those are at least steps in the right direction. It means little, though, if you are one of the farms awaiting payment, as the day-to-day management and future planning of farm businesses relies so heavily on the receipt of that payment. That makes offering advance payments attractive to so many,

and I hope that the Minister will put that in place. We would all like to see a target as close to 100% as we can. I gather that other paying agencies in the UK published and exceeded more ambitious and specific completion targets for 2012. For example, 95% of Welsh claimants received payments in the first three days, and over 91% of English claims were paid on the first day. It puts us to shame. The Rural Payments Agency, England's paying agency, was heavily criticised in the past by the National Audit Office, Westminster's Public Accounts Committee and, perhaps more importantly, farmers, and disallowances were applied. We should learn from that. The Rural Payments Agency has made significant improvements, as new leadership has worked to turn it into a customer-focused — ie farmer-focused — agency, and, in 2012, it published a five-year plan to improve delivery further. That is what we should be doing: treating the farmer as the customer.

Given that disallowances have been applied by the European Commission to other member states, there appears to be an issue with how effectively it communicates with paying agencies on what they are expected to deliver. That means that DARD must adequately implement without gold-plating but also engage, when necessary, to challenge the Commission. I agree with my colleague that the Minister should come to the House in the future —

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

Mr Kinahan: — and say when she will be in a position to seek approval from the EU Commission for advance payments.

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

Mr Hazzard: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I support the motion. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the single farm payment to our farming community here in Ireland, and, indeed, that is the reason why the Committee has undertaken a body of work on the issue and, subsequently, brought the motion to the Floor for discussion. When we look at how many agriculture producers are actually producing and living close to the poverty line, it really emphasises the level of dependence in many parts of the local farming sector on the single farm payment.

Recently, the Committee also brought a motion to the House concerning the need to ensure fair prices for our farming sector and for the market to return a fair living for all. Seen in this context, an effective single farm payment process is vital not only to our agriculture industry but to the wider population as a whole. The success of the single farm payment enables our farming businesses to compete in a global market while securing an acceptable level of public goods through cross-compliance, which, in turn, contributes to our future food security. It is fair to suggest that, without such payments, the majority of the farming sector would not be profitable, resulting in the demise of our food production capacity and a diminished ability to deliver social and environmental public goods. Bearing in mind the vital role of the single farm payment to our farming industry, the effective delivery of the inspection and payment process has become an issue for the Department and the farming community alike as all parties have worked towards a fluid and successful system.

Central to this evolution in the payment process is the development of new technology and modern techniques.

Developments such as remote sensing technology have been hugely beneficial. The benefit of such technology is the ability to allow the inspections to be carried out using satellite imagery that will enable officials to check claimed parcels remotely while simultaneously providing the facility to compare the measured area parcel with the area declared on the single application form. Coupling such technological advances with enhanced training and detailed protocols and improved guidance for inspectors, the combination of remote sensing and rapid and effective field visits will continue to reduce the burden of farm inspections in the years ahead.

In light of the substantial improvements made to the process in the past 12 months, with more than 80% of claims and £184 million successfully paid into bank accounts in December, it is important that we continue to explore ways in which the process can be enhanced. It is important that we do not stop at 80%. We should be constantly pushing for perfection, and, indeed, the key elements of CAP reform will demand such improvements. Inevitably, this involves a close working relationship between the farming industry and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. To this end, I was pleased to hear various industry voices speak positively about their relationship with the Department recently. For example, the Agricultural Consultants Association spoke at length about the advantages of an improved electronic system, with online applications less prone to administration errors and applications processed with greater accuracy. Online tracking of applications and record keeping is also considerably easier and user-friendly.

The benefits of these online developments are crucial. They greatly reduce DARD staff time as all of the information is on the system. As we move to a situation where more and more applications are processed online and more remote sensing is used, these technological advances are crucial. There is, however, little doubt that some of the consequences of these technological improvements had an impact on the processing of many 2011 applications and, undoubtedly, created unacceptable delays in some payments. However, following this period of transition, the enhancements that I have outlined today have since helped to transform the payment process.

I will conclude by paying tribute to our farming industry and our Minister, Michelle O'Neill. Our farming and agriculture industry continues to buck the recessionary trend experienced by many other sectors, and this is in no small measure due to the effective leadership of our Minister and the dedication and passion of local farmers.

Mr Buchanan: Maybe I should declare an interest as I receive a little single farm payment. As a member of the Agriculture Committee, I support the motion. As has been stated by other Members, the Committee has been involved in the review of the entire issue of single farm payments, especially the ongoing delays that farmers face before receiving that payment. We are all aware of the input of our farming industry into our wider rural economy, especially the agrifood industry. Therefore, it is important that, while the farming community is on its knees, it receives the appropriate support from the Department in getting single farm payments issued as quickly and as swiftly as possible. Today finds the farming industry financially crippled due to extreme weather conditions,

below-production prices, a continual increase in input costs, an unlevel playing field in the UK and wider EU marketplace and a plethora of red tape and gold-plating bureaucracy.

Among all of that, the most critical issue is the ongoing delays in the receipt of the single farm payments. In the current climate, the single farm payment is very important to the entire industry in helping to alleviate the cash flow crisis. Indeed, for many farming families, it has become more central to their income than ever before. Without the payment, many farm businesses would probably be rendered unviable. Although we all appreciate the complexity and the challenging nature of the administration of the single farm payment, both for the applicant and the Department, given the number of recipients, it is nevertheless totally unacceptable that farm businesses that receive an inspection are delayed in their payments for anything between six and 12 months.

5.15 pm

It is fair criticism of the Department that a lot of the confusion about what is eligible and ineligible land has been of its doing, due to a lack of clarity and an abysmal mapping system, yet it is always the farmer who pays the price for simple mistakes made, while the Department washes its hands of any responsibility. It is surely an indictment of the Department that, in a lot of cases last year, from the time of inspection to the time when the farmer received the report, three months had already passed. The farmer then received a sheaf of papers that, in many instances, he could not understand, causing further confusion and delays to the payment. Some farmers faced the added problem of TB on their farm, leaving them unable to sell stock, and, with the banks reducing their overdrafts, that only added to their financial problems.

At times like that, the farming industry was relying on its single farm payment, and the only comfort it could get from the Department was that it may have to wait for payment for another number of months. Again, that resulted in meal and fertiliser bills not being paid and, in some cases, suppliers having to close on their customers. Today, while I acknowledge that the Department has been listening to the pleas from the Committee and others, a lot more work is still required to alleviate this ongoing problem of delays in farmers receiving their single farm payment. Over this past month, I have been dealing with cases of farmers in west Tyrone who are struggling and unable to get their payments. On contacting the single farm payment branch, I am simply told that they are currently being validated and it will be some time yet before payment is forthcoming. That is not very good news for the farmer who is seeking to receive that payment or for the bank that he deals with. They do not know when this money is about to come or when it will be made available. I know that the Minister will seek to defend the Department by saying that 80-plus% have already been paid. However, I say to the Minister and her Department that that is little comfort to the other 20% of farm businesses that are ready to go under.

One of the great frustrations for the farming community in west Tyrone is that, while it is suffering serious financial hardships and practically begging for the single farm payment, it watched the Department and the Minister hand over almost £1 million to the GAA in Garvaghy, under pillar

2, although many believe that that project did not really meet the criteria. The time has come for the Department to get its priorities right and to work in the best interests of the farming community, which is really struggling at this time for the single farm payment.

Mr G Robinson: I support this very worthwhile motion on behalf of our farming community. It addresses one of the key financial essentials of the rural communities. It is, without doubt, even more essential in the current economic climate, in which farmers are under severe financial pressure from the retail sector, due to its desire to minimise prices for the consumer. We must remember that fertiliser, feeding and fuel costs etc have all risen substantially. Therefore, the single farm payment plays a central role in keeping farms financially viable, especially after this year's bad weather. That is also why the payments must be made on time to ensure that farmers are kept financially solvent. Without those payments, I am sure, some of our farmers could go out of business. I also urge the Minister to seek an average interest rate, either annual or monthly, for farmers' payments, as approximately 8% of the payments were lost due to the fixed-date system used this year.

The payments, of approximately £300 million, have the wider effect of supporting rural businesses, as farmers spend their money predominantly in the local area. Therefore, the single farm payment supports a rural business network, not just an individual farmer. Due to the vital role that the payments play in the rural economy, it is essential that the delivery system is as efficient as it can be.

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I welcome today's debate on the single farm payment and thank the Committee for the work that it has undertaken on the issue to date. The importance of the single farm payment to many farm businesses and the wider rural economy has been highlighted. The Chairperson of the Committee referred to the £300 million that the Department pays out as the accredited paying agency of the European Union. I will attempt to deal with all the issues that have been raised during the debate.

I updated the House on 26 November and acknowledged the delays that had been experienced by farm businesses that had an inspection in 2011. At that time, I put it on record that I thought that it was too long, and I outlined the steps that the Department was taking to ensure that we had more cases inspected sooner and that that would not be the situation in 2012.

Members will be aware that we faced a lot of criticism from the European Commission about our processes and that it was not content with the controls that we had in place. In order to address the Commission's concerns, I put in place a comprehensive programme of work with a number of strands. One of the strands focused on the on-the-spot inspections, and the Department has taken steps to improve them. Unfortunately, one of the consequences of those improvements was their knock-on effect on the processing of some 2011-inspected cases, coupled with more complex findings identified at inspection, which led to delays in some payments. Although my Department worked to clear those cases as quickly as possible, many of the changes that were identified at the inspection dated back a number of years. In those cases, the assessments are complex and take time to process, particularly if the single farm payment entitlements have to be recalculated

back to 2005. Inevitably, it took time to clear those payments.

At that time, I was asked to make a payment on account to farmers whose payments were delayed. Although that may have seemed like a reasonable request, the EU rules are very specific and only allow payments, including instalments, to be made when all checks on the claim are finalised and there is no risk to the fund. If I had made any part payments in those cases, we would have been operating outside EU rules and, as a result, could have faced further disallowance by the Commission. In addition, if we were able to make such a payment and subsequently found ourselves with cases where we had paid out too much money and had to claw that back from farmers, we could have put those farm businesses in an even more difficult financial situation. However, in recognition of the cash-flow difficulties that some farmers were experiencing because they received their single farm payments later than they expected, I met the local banks to explain the background to the delayed payments and updated them on progress. I made them aware that delays in finalising the payments could add to the financial difficulties that farmers faced and asked them to bear that in mind when considering the affected clients.

I also charged my Department to speed up inspections in 2012, and changes were made to the inspection and payment process. As a result, we started inspections nearly four weeks earlier in 2012 than in 2011, and we introduced remote sensing technology as a method of completing 250 on-the-spot checks. Those changes have made a positive difference, and I take on board and welcome the fact that Members have acknowledged that.

I am pleased to say that, as of today, just over 86.4% of claims have been finalised, and the vast majority of those were paid into farmers' bank accounts before Christmas. The 2012 figures include the 639 inspection cases, which is around five times more than the same time last year. We continue to work to clear the remaining cases and anticipate that we will have the majority of inspected claims cleared for payment by the end of May. Again, that is significantly earlier than last year, but I take on board the point that was made about being in the last group of people to be processed — it is only natural that that is where the frustration occurs. We are doing everything we can to make sure that we pay out to the majority of people before the end of May.

In addition to inspected cases, a number of other cases cannot be paid immediately for a variety of reasons: for example, the land claimed is being claimed by more than one farm business; probate is not completed; or bank account details are not provided by the farmer to enable payment to be credited to a bank account. In some cases, farmers have also claimed significantly more than the visible eligible area on the maps that we provided last spring and have not provided the Department with a reason. So those cases need to be checked carefully before a payment can be made.

While we have clearly made improvements in our processing arrangements and will carry the lessons learned into 2013, it is important to recognise that we constantly have to balance the impact of improvements with the need to make as many payments as possible as early as possible. We also have to ensure that our control processes are robust enough to stand up to audit scrutiny.

It is not in our interest to delay payments, and staff work hard to ensure that the cases are cleared as quickly as possible within the payment window of 1 December to 30 June.

2013 will also be a challenging year for the Department and the industry. I want to try to ensure that the payment targets in 2013 are at least comparable, but I need farmers to help us to achieve that. They can do that in a number of ways. First, as you are all aware, the new maps have started to issue. Those maps contain important new information about the maximum eligible area for farmers' fields, and they need to check those carefully and tell us as soon as possible about changes that are needed. There are likely to be many areas where changes can be identified only by the farmer. The Chair of the Committee pointed out that the onus for making sure that the maps are right is on the farmer. That is correct. Although DARD has a role to play in making sure that it issues the most appropriate map that it can with the most up-to-date information, the farmer knows their land best. So, it is up to the farmer to make sure that they walk their land, use their map and come back to the Department. It is very much a partnership approach. It is not about putting blame on one or the other; it is about working together.

The maps, which will form the baseline going forward, need to be correct and to continue to be corrected. Farmers must be proactive, and they have to tell us about the changes that they identify in their fields. I am pleased to report that, since the new maps have been processed, many farmers have contacted the Department and been in touch with us about the changes that are needed. I thank them for their quick response, but I encourage all farmers to do likewise.

Secondly, farmers will have more information to complete this year in their single application form, and they should take great care when doing so. In particular, they will need to make sure that they do not claim more than the maximum eligible area that we have told them about. If they claim more than that area for any fields, their claims will have to be further investigated. If farmers do not understand what they have to do, they need to ask for help from the Department, the agents who assist, such as the form fillers, or the farming unions. The more accurate the claims are when they are submitted, the fewer the queries and problems that arise. In turn, that should, obviously, help to speed up the processing.

We are required to check at least 5% of single farm payment cases to confirm the eligibility of the fields claimed. I am satisfied that our inspection controls are fit for purpose, and I will continue to keep those processes under review to ensure that that remains the case. As I stated, we undertook on-the-spot checks using remote sensing techniques in 2012. That approach, which is used in most other member states, including the South, as has been pointed out, has the potential to speed up the inspection and the payment process. I am reviewing the success of the processes deployed in 2012 and, in light of that, will make a further announcement on the matter in the coming months.

Members made a few core points, the first of which was around the onus on and responsibility of the farmer. As I said, it is very much a partnership approach, and I am committed to making sure that we do that.

Staff are trained continually. Ongoing training takes place in DARD Direct offices. If there are particular issues, I am happy for Members to come forward. I think that the staff that we have on the ground in the DARD Direct offices or on the ground with farmers are doing a very good job, but their training can always be updated. If there are any particular issues, I will be happy to listen to them.

Another point was about remote sensing. The Chair picked up on the issue of giving a figure that we are going to move to. As I said, it was 250 this time round. It is my intention to make sure that we significantly increase that number, but I will make a further statement to the House in the time ahead.

The issue of part payments and early payments was raised. To date, the focus has been on making sure that the systems that we operate are fit for the purpose of making sure that we get the inspections completed as quickly as possible, because that is the key to being able to make earlier payments. Obviously, remote sensing is key in improving our timescales around that. I am committed to making sure that we look at that in the context of CAP reform. That would be an opportunity to allow us to look at part payments and early payments. That is something that I am committed to, but I think that it is fair to say that many farmers claim their single farm payment at the very last minute. Members will be aware of that from the Committee inquiry. Thousands of applications arrive in the two or three days that run up to the deadline. I am happy to consider the scope that is there to look at the issues around earlier payments and part payments, but I am also happy to consider the scope to move to an earlier claim deadline, which the Chair also picked up on as part of his contribution. I think that the context of CAP reform will be the opportunity that allows us to do that.

I thank all Members for their contributions and the Committee for raising the issue again. As I said at the outset, the importance of single farm payments to the farming industry and the wider rural economy is £300 million in financial terms. It is very easy for me to support the motion fully because I am determined that we use all our modern technology to make sure that we accelerate payments to farmers; see a significant increase in remote sensing; have fit-for-purpose control mechanisms in place; and meet the needs of our farmers and get those necessary moneys out to them as quickly as possible.

5.30 pm

Mr Byrne (The Deputy Chairperson of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development): I thank Committee members and officials for all the work that was done in trying to conclude the inquiry into the single farm payment problem. As Deputy Chairman of the Committee, I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and to make a winding-up speech. I thank all the Members for taking part in the debate and the Minister for being present and making her speech.

There are many issues about the single farm payment, several of which the Chairperson, Mr Frew, highlighted in his opening remarks. In particular, he mentioned the fact that more than 38,000 farmers are involved in the single farm payment scheme. When the scheme was first launched, it was welcomed as the new way forward for EU-based agriculture. It was seen to streamline the previous multiple schemes into one single payment, but it would

appear that the processing of what was supposed to be a simplified system cannot be successfully administered in a timely manner by DARD.

Members should be aware that the single farm payment is not a benefit or bonus with which farmers are rewarded; it is a rightful entitlement under EU support for farming. In fact, it is the largest item of revenue that a farmer receives, and many families are suffering not only financially but emotionally as they try to cope as best they can as the delay in payment continues. As others stated, in 2011, the single farm payment was worth about £265 million to Northern Ireland, and because of the change in the euro exchange rate, it was worth about £247 million in 2012.

The real problem has been the slow processing of single farm payment applications for a number of years. It is causing frustration and anger, as many Members stated. Farming inspections are causing a lot of difficulty. There are delays in carrying out inspections, and, in particular, mixed messages coming from DARD officials, which cause big problems for many farmers. Officials are coming from south Down to carry out inspections in west Tyrone, and officials from west Tyrone are carrying out inspections in Antrim. I cannot understand why officials are criss-crossing six counties to carry out inspections.

Repeated so-called random inspections are adding greater pain for a number of farmers. I know farmers who have had random inspections in each of the past three years, and they are asking why they are so favourably being chosen in a random way. The farm mapping problem is still not resolved. The problem has been highlighted for a long time, and others referred to it. The land parcel identification system is still not working satisfactorily. Why is DARD so slow in sorting out that problem? Remote sensing is a great idea, but its implementation is still the practical problem.

We have had a bad history of single farm payment problems since 2005. DARD is blaming the farming community, but only the farmers are suffering the financial pain with delayed and disputed payments. Some farmers did not get their 2011 payment until the end of the summer of 2012, or even September or October 2012. That is unreasonable and unacceptable. DARD is lacking the urgency to sort out all those problems. The Agriculture and Rural Development Committee and MLAs are only too aware of the problems experienced by the farming community for the past two years.

As others stated, 2012 has been a particularly bad year for our farmers. We have all heard about numerous difficulties, such as bad weather, higher fuel, feed and fertiliser costs, and poor farm-gate prices. Cash flow problems that have been increased by bank credit restrictions have all added to the problems that the farmer faces. Many farmers are now, like never before, heavily reliant on single farm payment cheques to ease the financial difficulty in which they find themselves. Delays to the single farm payment add to the pain and frustration. All in all, the farming community feels that the Assembly must be more responsive in dealing with the problem. Indeed, many farmers ask why MLAs cannot get DARD sorted.

The Department needs to reflect on the multiple problems that arose in 2011, learn from its mistakes and focus on the systems that it needs to have in place to deal with those mistakes. Farmers need to hear from the Minister that that

is a priority for her and the Department, and I acknowledge the statement that she just made. I urge DARD to take more urgent steps to alleviate the problems of farmers, particularly those who have experienced delayed inspections and consequential delayed payments.

Throughout the debate, Committee members raised a large range of issues. I think that it is fair to say that it was an excellent debate, in that many of the issues were highlighted and, indeed, some Committee members acknowledged the improvements that have taken place.

Mr Frew outlined extensively all the broad parameters that are associated with single farm payment applications, their processing and the payments that are delayed as a result of inspections, as well as all the frustration that that brings to the 20% of farmers who are involved in those inspections. Mr McMullan noted the difficulties that occurred in 2011, particularly the problems that the banks created. He also discussed the importance of the single farm payment to the farmer and, indeed, to the rural economy. Jo-Anne Dobson commented strongly on the administrative difficulties of last year's payments and its being a disaster for many farmers. She talked about too much time having been taken up by administrative procedures, which other Members referred to.

A hard economic year has been made more difficult, because late payments have added to frustration. Over the Christmas holidays, I visited a number of farm-supply businesses. One very big animal-feed supplier in west Tyrone told me that he is suffering as a consequence of the delayed payments that farmers are not getting. The banks are putting continued pressure on him.

Mr Rogers spoke about the number of late payments in 2011 and the impact that that is having on the local farmer's ability to pay his bills. He also mentioned the need to explore the possibility of advanced payments. A number of other Members mentioned that.

One thing about farmers is that, when they get money, they are prepared to spend it. Circular flow in the rural economy is crucial. Last Friday, I visited a farmer who said that the good thing about a farmer is that if he gets £100 of income, he will often spend £200, as he will borrow another £100 to make the first £100 work. As a result, he creates greater circular flow in the local economy.

Kieran McCarthy talked about the importance of the single farm payment to the rural economy. He talked about supporting DARD's measures to ensure that disallowance is not repeated. I agree that the history of EU disallowance has not been good for the region. The question is: why are we so poor at administration? Where is the problem? Is it the farmer or is it the DARD officials? That is an open question. However, I think that DARD is very quick to blame the farmer unfairly for any discrepancy when it has all the resources, power of government and administrative back-up of a full-time Civil Service. Yet and all, there are major questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of what the Department does.

William Irwin noted that the new mapping system was to speed up the whole process but that, despite the new system, farmers are still expected to check and recheck, and that if there is a difficulty, the blame very often stops with the farmer.

Declan McAleer again emphasised the importance of farming in rural areas. He welcomed the improvements made by DARD in recent times and talked about the importance of encouraging DARD to develop further in order to have a more effective and efficient system.

Trevor Clarke acknowledged that, coming late in the debate, it is hard to bring new issues to the debate and the House. He also talked about —

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

Mr Byrne: — the importance of the single farm payment to the rural economy.

Many other Members mentioned the importance of the single farm payment.

Mr Kinahan, in particular, talked about the greater performance by the Rural Payments Agency —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry; the Member's time is up.

Mr Byrne: — in Britain. Wales and England have much higher rates of upfront payments early on.

I commend the motion, and I thank all those who took part in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly acknowledges the importance of single farm payments to the farming industry and to the wider rural economy; expresses concern about the issues arising from the inspection and payment system for the 2011 scheme; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that systems for the delivery of the scheme in the future are fit for purpose and that the inspection process is expedited effectively.

Adjourned at 5.41 pm.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 January 2013

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Will you advise the House what action can be taken against a Member who breaches the code of conduct? In particular, I refer to the personal conduct of Members who have:

“a duty to uphold the law and to act on all occasions in accordance with the public trust placed in them.”

Furthermore, in respect of promoting good relations, Members must:

“act in a way that is conducive to promoting good relations...and promoting a culture of respect for the law.”

Specifically, the Member for South Belfast Mr Maskey said on Sunday that Short Strand residents were behaving impeccably, despite evidence of residents wearing balaclavas, wielding baseball bats and throwing bricks and bottles at the protesters. Furthermore, last night and this morning, he said on various media outlets that his response to the violence visited on members of the Short Strand community, which is to be condemned, would be to meet it with violence. In those circumstances, what action can be taken against a Member who has flouted the code of conduct for Members?

Mr Speaker: First, Members will know that I give them some latitude on points of order. Secondly, this is not a point of order. Thirdly, it is not an issue for the Speaker. I direct the Member to the Standards and Privileges Committee or to Clerks in Parliament Buildings. It is certainly not a matter for the Speaker, and it is not a point of order.

Mr G Kelly: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker, is it in order for the Member across the Floor to misquote another Member in the House? Whatever happened outside the House, as you have pointed out, Mr Speaker, is not necessarily anything to do with you. This has been said in the House, and he has misquoted the Member.

Mr Speaker: Order. I want to say to the whole House — *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us all be careful in whatever contribution we make in the House. Let us not make a bad situation outside the Chamber worse. Let us all be careful. We all have a responsibility, as political parties in the House, to behave in an appropriate manner. *[Interruption.]* Order. Let us all move on.

Private Members' Business

Inclusivity, Mutual Respect, Peace and Democracy

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 published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment will have 10 minutes in which to propose and five minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

I would also like to inform the House that a valid petition of concern was presented today in relation to the amendment. Under Standing Order 28, the vote on the amendment cannot be taken today. Both votes, therefore, will be taken at the start of business on Monday. However, the debate can take place in the Chamber today. I also remind Members that another effect of the petition is that the vote on the amendment will be on a cross-community basis.

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move

That this Assembly reaffirms its commitment to the principles of inclusivity, mutual respect, peace and democracy; condemns all acts of violence and intimidation against police officers, elected representatives, other members of society, homes and property at all times; and calls on all political parties to support the spirit of the Belfast Agreement.

I must say that I am puzzled by what there is in the amendment to be concerned about, but perhaps that will become clear during the debate, which I hope will be respectful. I hope that we will use moderate language and have even tempers. Equally importantly, we should have an honest debate and perhaps even a passionate one and face up to some inconvenient truths. If we do not, we cannot command the respect for this debating Chamber that we need from those looking in and among ourselves. This is not a day on which to dwell endlessly on how far we have come. It is a day to front up to what has yet to be achieved, and some big ticket issues are on the to-do list, even though we have come a decent way on our journey.

In 1998, I was a journalist reporting the Troubles and not the only journalist supportive of the objective of the Belfast Agreement to bring about a political process that would offer peace. That was because, for far too long, far too many journalists stood at the white tape, waiting to tell

the world the name of the man who had been murdered or whose jobs had been bombed out of existence. I could not tell you how many deaths I reported while presenting 'Good Morning Ulster' in the 1980s. Sometimes, that took me deep into the human cost of the Troubles through reporting the impact of a murder by talking to a priest, a minister, a neighbour or colleague, perhaps a close relative who knew the deceased as a son, a father, a husband and a relative. Such people spoke from the heart about the human cost.

On other days, only politicians were available, and it seemed to me that they simply blamed each other. Some mornings, it was as if the politicians had forgotten that there was a body in the morgue, such was the bitterness of the mud-slinging. It seems to me that we are back there again: mud-slinging. It was the leaflets. It was the vote. It was a democratic vote. It was pure provocation. This debate is an opportunity to call "Time out" on that and to reflect. The leaflets have been distributed. The vote has been taken. The consequences reveal that there are problems that we all have to deal with.

Fifteen years ago, I reported the promise of the Belfast Agreement, a promise that better times lay ahead: better times and better politics, as this Chamber replaced direct rule; respect for each other's identity and culture; and a peace dividend for an economy that had been relentlessly targeted, diminished and held back by a concerted terrorist campaign for 30 years. Let me be as clear as I was yesterday about the violence of the past five weeks: it is all wrong. It has done huge damage to our economy and to the public purse.

Let us not rewrite history. An IRA bomb could and sometimes did cost the economy tens of millions of pounds in a split second, and the continued threat of republican violence means that tens of millions more that could be spent UK-wide alleviating poverty, deprivation and dereliction is currently ring-fenced for antiterrorist policing. I cannot imagine how I, as leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, can reach out to those republican terrorists. My party brought forward an agreement that was put to referendum here and in the Republic and hugely endorsed. It was also rejected in spectacular and murderous fashion by republican terrorists in Omagh and, more recently, through the murders of PSNI officers, soldiers and a prison officer.

"Leadership" is the buzzword today. My predecessor David Trimble showed leadership in 1998. He attended funeral masses in Buncrana in Donegal for three of the young victims of the Omagh bomb, dismissive of the personal discomfort potentially coming his way from the Orange Order. Let us not forget that, earlier in that year, before the deal and the referendum, he stood shoulder to shoulder with Seamus Mallon, with whom he was to share the office of the First Minister, in Poyntzpass, to be with the community there in the wake of the murders of Philip Allen and Damien Trainor. So it is nothing new for those in the key offices of this devolved Government to stand together to condemn murder and violence. What would be new would be for some Members to accept the little phrase — the subclause in the middle section of our motion — that:

"condemns all acts of violence and intimidation against police officers, elected representatives, other members of society, homes and property at all times".

"At all times" means that there are no circumstances that justify violence, including the murder of police officers. It is an absolute, not a conditional statement.

I was shocked to watch the discussion on the late news on UTV last night and to hear Alex Maskey, a Member of the House, state that, if he lived in the Short Strand, he would be out throwing stones at the street protests [*Interruption.*] I condemn the violence visited upon the residents — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker — [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I welcome your ruling at the beginning of the session. I listened to Mr Nesbitt start his comments by saying that today is not about what happened yesterday or last week but about what we do from here on in. I strongly advise Mr Nesbitt not to misquote me in the Chamber today. [*Interruption.*] There is a full transcript available, as Mr Nesbitt, as a former journalist, will know. He should not misquote me in the Chamber today. [*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has it on the record.

Mr Nesbitt: I am confident that I reflect the spirit of the words that I heard last night on UTV's late night news.

I condemn the violence. I do not condone any violence. Mr Maskey, if I understand him correctly, is concerned that somebody will get seriously hurt. So am I. He is calling for leadership. So do I, but we need to understand what sort of leadership is required. Is it to justify violence in any circumstances? Not in my book, it is not. Some unionists on the lower Newtownards Road think that leadership means me standing shoulder to shoulder with them on the streets. I think that it means offering a path that takes them off the streets to a political place where they can have hope of delivery on the issues that concern them. Nobody needs to be injured to do that, just as nobody needed to die to get us where we are today in the Chamber.

My party calls for a return to the spirit of the Belfast Agreement. I acknowledge that the DUP has tabled an amendment to that part of our motion. We will not die in a ditch over that, as long as we get this opportunity to explain exactly what we mean by the spirit of the agreement. I have already referred to perceived difficulties in delivery regarding politics, the economy, culture and identity, but there was another area where the Belfast Agreement was an unqualified success. That is in regard to the constitutional question, which was settled in 1998 and endorsed by referendum. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. The recent census does nothing to undermine that position. Only one in four people took the option in the census to describe themselves as "Irish only". That is no basis on which to build a united Ireland.

Northern Ireland is part of the UK, and that means that the Union flag is the flag of this country, and it is everybody's flag. I do not expect the people of the Short Strand to start wrapping themselves in the Union Jack every time they set out from home. In fact, I would like to see an end to some people wrapping themselves in the Union flag — the ones who throw stones and petrol bombs at the Short Strand

and at the police. That does nothing to promote the values of Britishness that I cherish.

10.45 am

The spirit of the Belfast Agreement also means that we in the House commit to tackling the big, outstanding issues, of which there are many. If there is an opportunity, coming out of the past five weeks, it is for us to face up to the challenges of dealing with the past, reconciliation and building a truly shared future. It seems to me that we could do no better today than begin by seeing whether we can agree a common definition of what we mean by those concepts. I debated the issue of dealing with the past, albeit briefly, with a former republican Member of this House in another place in Dublin. It was immediately clear that we did not agree on the starting point for dealing with the past. He certainly did not see it as starting in the late 1960s but wanted to go back considerably further.

When and, more importantly, for whose benefit do we want to deal with the past? Is it for those who have been most impacted by the violence, incident by incident, or is it to enable society to move forward? What does reconciliation mean? Sinn Féin offered a vision recently. It is not my vision, but the spirit of the Belfast Agreement says that you do not stop there; you continue to negotiate. What does a shared future mean? For me, it is not the neutrality that we see in Belfast city centre and the signs in pubs that say, "No sports shirts". For me, it is about a sign that says, "Rangers and Celtic tops both welcome". It is about being more than simply bland. That is the spirit of the Belfast Agreement that I would wish to revive.

Mr Campbell: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after "times;" and insert

"and calls on all political parties to give full effect to their commitment to the consent principle, which recognises Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom."

In moving the amendment, I concur with much of what Mr Nesbitt said. I hope that our amendment does nothing to detract from the underlying principles of the motion, with the exception of the past of the Belfast Agreement. Like Mr Nesbitt, I am amazed that there is a petition of concern, but there it is. It is within the rules of the House to table it, and it has been tabled.

The onus on all of us as political representatives in the House today, in the current environment, over the past weeks and in the coming weeks, is to display two main characteristics. Our first responsibility is to take that leadership role on our shoulders and give effective representative leadership to people. We did that yesterday, and, hopefully, we will do so again today. Unfortunately, there are occasions when individual Members let themselves down considerably in the media. In exercising that responsibility, we also have to be direct and honest.

The motion condemns all acts of violence and intimidation. We did that yesterday, and, as I say, we need to do so again. Unfortunately, a former Member of the House — a former Member for West Belfast, now a TD in the Irish Republic — Mr Gerry Adams was interviewed and said that no acts of violence of any kind had emanated from the Short Strand. Unfortunately for him, the video evidence is

contrary to that. All acts of violence of all kinds need to be repudiated, and the violence needs to stop.

The debate gives us a gilt-edged opportunity to delve down into some of the underlying reasons for the problems that we face. If, in an honest and responsible fashion, we face up to those underlying reasons, we can make some progress.

I read a headline in a national newspaper last week that stated that the Belfast riots were not over a flag but the creation of a fairer society. When I read the headline, I thought that at last, on a national basis, some journalist has got it. Then I read the story: he did not get it. Unfortunately, he went off on a tangent as others have done.

In trying to create an inclusive society with mutual respect, peace and democracy, one of the problems that we are dealing with today is that there are many peaceful protestors out on the streets who do not see much evidence of that. That is part of the problem. If we have a scenario such as occurred in Northern Ireland in 2012 when parades from the loyalist community passing a Catholic church were subject to severe restriction, monitoring and adjustment by the Parades Commission but a republican parade passing a Protestant church was not subject to the same restriction, scrutiny or attention by the Parades Commission, people will get an impression.

A delegation from my party asked the Equality Commission to come to see us last week, because there is an impression out there that jobs are not allocated on the basis of merit. Some people in the Chamber tried to create the scenario 30 or 40 years ago that an unfair and non-inclusive society led us to where we were with the violence. However, they do not seem to accept where we are now and that many people in the unionist community see an unfair, non-inclusive society. Those people see the promotion of Irish at the expense of Ulster Scots. They see national identity being diminished if you are British but promoted if you are Irish. It made me wonder when I read the headline that said that the Belfast riots are over not the flag but the creation of a fairer society.

A fairer society is something that this party wants and has been campaigning for for years. It is what we need to get. If people on the streets, whether they are passing the Short Strand or living there, could see a much fairer society, they would say that the people up on the hill are doing the job that they were elected to do. We have made some progress, but we have considerable progress to make. We need to get to the point — hopefully, we will get to it this week — where people understand the resentment that exists not just in working-class unionist communities but right across unionist communities and in nationalist communities about an ongoing failure to understand the concept of disadvantage in those communities.

If you have a one-sided inquiries process into the past, people in our communities will ask, "How long will this go on?" The perpetrators of the violence in the first place will not admit that they were wrong and will not apologise, but the Prime Minister, who is responsible for dealing with the violence, then apologises for an overreaction on the part of those who were dealing with the violence.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member clarify why the DUP and, indeed, the UUP have consistently voted against motions in the House calling for cross-party talks with the Irish Government and the British Government to agree a comprehensive mechanism to deal with the past?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I can answer that. Unfortunately, in dealing with the past, you are met with those whose organisation perpetuated the violence for decades. They will not accept the part that they played in creating and perpetuating that violence. They will not accept that they were wrong, that they were in error and that they should apologise and move on. They will not do that. They accept that they were combatants. They try to equate combatants' acts of murder with the actions of those who responded to their murder. That is why we cannot deal with the past in the way that the honourable Member would like us to.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mrs D Kelly: Will the Member encourage his party leader to respond to the correspondence that my party leader sent him last week setting out methods of dealing with the past in a comprehensive way? As yet, we have not had a response.

Mr Campbell: I am sure that, if the honourable Member's party leader wrote to my party leader last week, there will be a response in due course and probably within a matter of days. The honourable Member will not complain that there has been undue delay, given the problems that we have out on the streets. I am sure there will be a response.

In conclusion, I come to the Unionist Forum, which I have heard various nationalists and republicans mention. They have complained that it is one-sided and that unionists talking to themselves will not solve the problem. In some respects, I agree: it will not solve the problem. The capacity for both the SDLP and Sinn Féin to involve themselves in the outcome of the Unionist Forum is essential. I have raised some of the issues — only some because of time restrictions — and they will come through the Unionist Forum. At that point, it will be an absolute prerequisite for nationalists and republicans to say, "This is how we are going to step up to the mark to dealing with this". If there is disadvantage in the unionist community — there is — we will want to hear what you are going to do about it. We definitely will. You will not be excluded then; you will be very much included. We will know what we want to do, and we will want to hear your proposals for dealing with the disadvantage, the sectarianism, the one-sided inquiry process and the diminution of Britishness as a consequence of the promotion of Irishness. We will want to hear your proposals about that, yes we will. You will have a very strong and effective role to play, and hopefully you will play it.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Go raibh míle maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I speak in favour of the motion. It is welcome, not just because of its authorship but because it represents an attempt to return to the high ground of leadership, hope and aspiration that was endorsed, ratified and welcomed by the people of Ireland in the development of the agreement. That is historical reality. There is another reality affecting our current circumstances. When I look at the amendment, in particular the removal of the reference to the Belfast Agreement — more commonly referred to as the Good Friday Agreement — I think that is a pity.

I state this for the record: I embrace and respect the consent principle, which also means accepting the current constitutional status quo. I respect it, and I accept it. I say that because I have the power under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement to bring about a united Ireland. I have to convince sufficient numbers of people and my colleagues to bring about that constitutional change. Until that position arrives, I will accept the status quo. I hope that that is as clear as I can make it. There are no grounds for political violence against the political arrangements on this island, because we now all have the possibility —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Perhaps to someone else, but you have just had your opportunity, if you do not mind.

People have the opportunity now to change the political circumstances of governance on our island. If that could be done tomorrow, I would do it tomorrow; if it takes longer, I am prepared to take longer, and it will be done by peaceful persuasion and through the democratic mandate of the people of this island. We should all embrace that.

In the flag protests, I see a continuation of the denial that is represented by the tabling of the amendment. The amendment, if it had not removed the reference to the Good Friday Agreement, would have been perfectly acceptable. However, to ask me, who was involved in the negotiations and campaigned for and engaged in a widespread national debate along with my party colleagues to convince republicans that it was the opportunity for a new beginning, to repudiate that agreement is not on. It is a denial of the progress that we have made and debases not just the progress that has been made since the Good Friday Agreement but the value that was added in the negotiations at Hillsborough and St Andrews. Therefore, if we are getting denial from political unionism, which the amendment represents, it is little wonder that, on the streets, unionists are responding to that absence of political leadership with violent political reaction to an issue that could and should be understood and should be accepted on the basis of parity of esteem.

Is flying the Union Jack 365 days a year parity of esteem? Can anybody sensibly argue that that represents parity of esteem for nationalists and republicans? It does not. Is there a single council that will fly the tricolour at the present time? No. Do I feel any less Irish as a result? I repudiate and do not accept for one moment those who are arguing that the reason that we have political —

11.00 am

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Let me finish this point and then I will accept your intervention.

Some are arguing that the unionists — and they are unionists; let us describe them as they are — who are rioting on our streets, visiting violence on people in their homes and stopping and disrupting life in our cities and towns are doing so on the basis that their national identity, as they would describe it, has been diminished by the fact that Belfast City Council is now a much more inclusive place and represents diversity in our society. I want to hear people explain that in rational terms.

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. He said that he now accepts the constitutional position of Northern

Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom unless and until the majority of the people vote otherwise. Is he now saying that he accepts that the IRA campaign of ethnic cleansing, particularly in the border areas, was also wrong? Can he condemn that today? Does he accept that some of the actions of his party, coupled with those of the SDLP, in naming play parks after those who are seen as terrorists is the way forward?

Mr Speaker: The Member has a minute added on to his time.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: Thank you very much. I accept your perspective absolutely, and I respect it. I do not agree with it, and I do not expect you to agree with my perspective on the people I knew who became involved in the IRA. I know them, and I know my community. I know that they were heroic figures in our community. I do not shove that down your throat, and I do not expect you to understand it. We have some uncomfortable conversations to engage in, and I stand ready and willing to do that.

There have been references to the discussion on the television last night. The individual concerned was shot in his own home, and a friend who was helping him to decorate that home was shot dead. That is the background against which he makes his comments. There is a lot of hurt on all sides of our community, and we need to understand —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: We need to understand our responsibility. This place is based on the agreement that was endorsed by the people of Ireland; the Good Friday Agreement, with added value from the Hillsborough negotiations and the St Andrews negotiations. We should continue that political leadership and that direction.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Dr McDonnell: I welcome the opportunity to speak, and I appeal to people to try to look to the future rather than to the past.

I speak in support of the motion and, in particular, its appeal for support for the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement. However, we need much more than spirit, and I call on unionist leaders to embrace and support the values and principles of that agreement, because it is within that agreement that we all can and must find our way out of the current mess. In fact, I believe that failure to live up to those principles and values, and the political cherry-picking of that agreement, has contributed significantly to our present difficulties. The agreement directly addresses some, perhaps most, of the difficulties that we are now facing and gives this Assembly its legitimacy and authority to do what we do here. Without the agreement, we have no foundation or legitimacy.

We are told by some that the agreement confirmed the status of Northern Ireland in the UK and that, therefore, the Union flag is the national flag, and that that is the end of the matter. However, I will remind people gently that the agreement says:

"the power of the sovereign government with jurisdiction there shall be exercised with rigorous impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity of their identities and traditions and shall be founded on the principles of full respect for, and equality of, civil,

political, social and cultural rights, of freedom from discrimination for all citizens, and of parity of esteem and of just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos, and aspirations of both communities".

That is a lot, Mr Speaker. Impartiality, diversity, respect, equality, parity of esteem and just and equal treatment. How can any of us square that with a winner-takes-all approach to flag flying or any other aspect of life?

Mr Givan: Will the Member give way?

Dr McDonnell: No. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: The question for unionist leaders today is whether they have signed up for the transformation of division in our society or for its mere containment and management. This choice goes far beyond flags. Where is parity of esteem? Where is the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement in their call for gerrymandering of Belfast to retain unionist control or in fair housing allocation in Girdwood or in North/South co-operation or even in such an obviously good idea as the Narrow Water bridge, where a massive slice of the cost, some 90%, was being funded from elsewhere? Where is there even a hint of parity of esteem in their handling of the flag issue and the associated violence?

The motion calls for inclusivity and mutual respect. How much inclusivity and mutual respect is demonstrated by establishing a narrow one-sided conversation in the form of a tribal Unionist Forum?

Why is there such opposition to the re-establishment of the Civic Forum that is part of this institution? It is a mechanism that would empower our civic society and facilitate the type of inclusive conversation, based on mutual respect, that is needed to resolve controversial issues eating away at our society.

Mr Speaker, how can we have inclusivity and mutual respect if unionist leaders will not honestly tell their people that, in the new order of life and politics and in the transformation of division, things will look and feel a bit different?

The ways of the past cannot be the way of the future, yet what we are hearing from the leader of the DUP is that violence is the result of the Alliance Party changing what he called the established status quo in the City Hall and that all this violence has been brought about by just one action. On the other hand, the next day, we are told that it is about a whole plethora of things. In any of that, there is no mention about the 40,000 scurrilous leaflets that were circulated in east Belfast and which were intended to bring about the sort of violence that we have. There is no mention of elected representatives —

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Just so that the leader of the SDLP gets his facts right, there were not 40,000 leaflets distributed in east Belfast. They were delivered across the city, so, if you are going to quote something, do it accurately.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us move on. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Dr McDonnell: That is even worse. I thought that it was only in east Belfast, but I now know that it was even more widespread. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Dr McDonnell: There is no mention, in all of this, of elected representatives of both parties taking part in, supporting and condoning illegal protests night after night, side by side with men of violence.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Dr McDonnell: There is not much point in talking about a shared society and then supporting activities —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Dr McDonnell: — and policies designed to increase division.

Mr Lyttle: I join the House in condemning the violence on the streets of east Belfast last night, and, indeed, I stand against any inflammatory language that may have been used by elected representatives in relation to that issue. I have seen the harsh consequence of that type of interface violence first hand. I have sat in homes at the bottom of the Newtownards Road and in Short Strand and had grown women break down in tears because they have not been able to communicate the consequences of that violence with even the closest members of their families. I have had to assist them in moving home as a result of that violence. It is not helping or serving any cause whatsoever, and people need to think seriously about that.

I welcome and support the opportunity that the motion gives to every Member of the Assembly to reaffirm explicit support for a shared future and the principles of the Belfast Agreement at this very difficult time. I and my party will not support the amendment from the DUP, which is wholly unnecessary and is a concerning attempt to dilute the motion and remove reference to the Belfast Agreement.

Indeed, it is deeply concerning that Mike Nesbitt, the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, does not see that as a concern, as a key signatory of that agreement.

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: No, I will not.

I am very aware that the people of Northern Ireland expect much more than rhetoric from the Assembly on this serious level of violence and disruption in Northern Ireland, and they are calling on elected representatives to deliver on demands that a majority — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Lyttle: — of people in this community made when they voted in favour of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. Unfortunately, elected representatives have fallen short of delivering on those principles and demands, particularly on the issue of building a shared and integrated society and particularly by missing an opportunity to demonstrate what a shared future policy would look like in action, when they opposed a respectful, balanced and sustainable flags policy at Belfast City Hall and in councils across Northern Ireland. Rather than use the flags issue as an opportunity to demonstrate —

Mr Speaker: Order, Members. There are a number of conversations going on around the Chamber, and they should be taken outside. *[Interruption.]* Order. Allow the Member to continue.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Rather than use this flags policy as an opportunity to demonstrate what a

shared future would look like in action and in practice — balance, compromise, mutual respect and, dare I say, even change — the DUP, UUP and PUP U-turned on long-standing support for designated days, and misled the community that this policy and the Alliance Party — the only party to stand up for the shared future position — were anti-British and anti-identity. That is plain wrong. There is nothing anti-British about a UK Government and Royal College of Arms-endorsed policy of respectfully displaying the Union flag on designated days.

The Ulster Unionist Party said in 2000 that by accepting the:

“legitimate expression of British identity through the flying of the flag on the 17 [flag-flying] days ... the SDLP and Sinn Fein will be honoring their obligation in the Belfast Agreement to show ‘sensitivity’ and ‘promote mutual respect’ rather than division”.

The PUP said:

“Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom as per the will of the people. There is no requirement to all day every day ensure that that glaring fact is appreciated.”

So what changed?

A Member: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: No I will not give way.

I want to use this opportunity to make this clear point to the people of east Belfast and across Northern Ireland: this issue has been manipulated by political parties and people who are less concerned about creating a sustainable and positive expression of British identity in Northern Ireland and who are more interested in exploiting strongly held feelings for a flag for their own selfish political end, regardless of the consequences.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: I am not going to give way. There are many members of the Alliance Party and indeed people from across —

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: If I could finish, I might give way. Indeed, people from across this community understand and, indeed, have given their life in service for the positive values that that Union flag represents. Those values and that British identity are in no way disrespected or diminished by the adoption of a balanced policy of respectful display of the Union flag in line with the UK Government and Royal College of Arms designated days policy. That policy also respects and reflects that not all members of this community regard the Union flag as representative of their values and identity, and it is right that councils represent this diversity of identities in other creative ways.

I am fully committed to engaging with people who are disconnected from politics, but for unionist politicians to tell this community that a unionist forum or a united unionist candidate is somehow going to change the fact that it is in the best interests of this community to work out the principles of compromise and balance enshrined in the Belfast Agreement is raising unrealistic expectations and leading the people up a dead end.

Mr A Maginness: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, I give way.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Member for giving way. He has very usefully pointed out the ridiculous position that the Ulster Unionist Party and the PUP are in whenever they accepted designated days in 2000, but the DUP in Craigavon council and in Lisburn council also accepted designated days. That is consistent with the other two unionist parties. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his intervention. He is absolutely right and, indeed, it makes a mockery of the U-turn that we saw in Belfast City Council.

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

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, Mr Speaker.

Dr Farry: Will the Member give way?

Mr Lyttle: Yes, I give way.

Dr Farry: I thank the Member for giving way. Further to that, the issue of the flag flying on Parliament Buildings was never raised by the DUP, at least since 2007. Why was it only raised in response to what happened in Belfast City Hall? What sort of signal is that sending?

Mr Lyttle: I thank the Member for his —

Mr Moutray: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Maginness made a point in relation to Craigavon council. He said that the DUP supported designated days. That is patently untrue, and I would like to clarify that fact now. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Order. The Member has it on the record.

11.15 am

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The Member, obviously, did not dispute the point about the DUP's acceptance of designated days at Lisburn City Council. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Further lies are being told in the Chamber. The DUP on Lisburn City Council has never accepted designated days, and our flag flies every day in Lisburn City Council.

Mr Speaker: Order. Order. Members should be very careful about calling other Members liars. Let us be very careful of our terminology and our language in the Chamber. *[Interruption.]* Order.

Mr B McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I agree with your ruling, but I think that an opportunity should be given to the Member to withdraw his allegation.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member did not name a Member. That is the difference. However, I still warn the Member, and Members in the House, to be very careful of the terminology used in the Chamber, especially the use of language.

Mr Lyttle: Thank you, Mr Speaker. The point is that an opportunity was — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Order.

Mr Lyttle: — missed to show a shared-future policy in action. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Lyttle: Mr Speaker, can I close quickly and assure the House — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Lyttle: — that the Alliance Party will not be deterred or intimidated for standing for a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member's time is gone. Order.

Lord Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I would like you to consider the fact that when a Member gets up in the House and repeats what was said by another Member when it is clear that what was said was totally inaccurate, would you make a clear ruling on how that should be responded to. I accept, of course, that unparliamentary language, such as "liar", is unacceptable. However, when a person deliberately gives wrong information on the Floor and accuses other Members — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Morrow: Could you, Mr Speaker, give some direction on such matters?

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let me deal with this point of order first from Lord Morrow. As Speaker, I do not sit in judgement and determine what is right or wrong and what Members say in the Chamber. However, during a point of order, I give Members the opportunity to correct what has been said and to get it on the record. That is the important point. *[Interruption.]* Order. I will take the point of order from Mr Humphrey.

Mr Humphrey: During his contribution a moment ago, Mr Lyttle referred to the DUP, the UUP and the PUP as having reversed their position on designated days. Let me make this very clear: in Belfast City Council, the DUP and the UUP have consistently voted for the Union flag to fly and have never supported designated days, so that is untrue.

Mr Speaker: Order. Once again, the Member has that on the record. Let us please move on.

Mr Poots: Yesterday, David Ford identified that there were underlying tensions in the community, and that the issues that have arisen over the last few weeks had been going on for some time during the summer. That makes the decision that the Alliance Party made in Belfast City Council, and I will come to that later, all the more bizarre. However, I will visit the issue of why these tensions may exist. The motion talks about:

"inclusivity, mutual respect, peace and democracy".

Those are very important issues because, if we are to bring the community with us on all of these issues, we need to respect and reflect that.

In my duty in the House and in my other duties, I meet people from all sections of the community daily, and I deal with people from all sections of the community, and I seek to deal with them in a very fair and impartial way for the best interests of the community. I think that the Assembly and the Executive have been doing good work to build good relations in Northern Ireland. However, many of the problems that exist are outside our control.

Across the way, we have republicans and nationalists. That is what they are, and they are entitled to be republicans and nationalists; therefore, they will put forward a particular agenda. We have the Alliance Party, which claims to be a non-sectarian party, and I will deal with that in a moment. But — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Poots: In all of this, the fulfilment and meeting of particular agendas can cause real damage to a community. When it comes to historical and public inquiries, for example, there seems to be an entire focus, which is aimed against the loyalist community and people who have engaged in loyalist terrorism —

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Poots: I did not see the Member give way to anybody.

Mr A Maginness: He gave way to me.

Mr Speaker: Order. Let us not have debate across the Chamber.

Mr Poots: I will correct what I said: he only gave way to his own colleagues.

When we look at the issue of public inquiries, we hear about Bloody Sunday and Finucane. It is always in the news; it is constant. We have a Prime Minister and a Government who are constantly giving in. How many people who have engaged in republican terrorism activities have been brought to book by the Historical Enquiries Team? Many people in the unionist community are concerned. They look at 1971, 1972, 1973, and so forth, when the main protagonists were the IRA, and they see how few IRA people have actually been brought to book by the Historical Enquiries Team. And you wonder why the community out there gets aggravated about things.

Mr Campbell: I thank the Member for giving way. He has come at a very important point. Does he agree that there is a sadness in the Chamber today that the initial contributions from the other side — Sinn Féin, SDLP and Alliance — have not concentrated on those underlying issues, which the debate gives us the opportunity to debate, discuss and to delve into, to ascertain why people are on the streets, peacefully protesting? People seem to be keeping their head in the sand and avoiding why they are on the streets.

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

Mr Poots: I thank the Member for the intervention. Mitchel McLaughlin might see IRA figures as heroes, but we see them as terrorists; the vast majority of the public see them as terrorists, and they should be brought to book for their actions. We have little faith in what is going on with the Historical Enquiries Team, unless it brings the IRA to book for its activities. The Northern Ireland Office needs to step up to the mark and take into account those views, because it has a contribution in all of this.

We have a Parades Commission that does not command the confidence of the unionist community. I have met the Parades Commission and been treated with the greatest degree of indignity by that group of people. It treats elected —

Mr Speaker: Order. There are a number of conversations going on around the Chamber, and I have asked that those conversations be had outside. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Poots: It treats elected representatives with contempt and, unsurprisingly, it is chaired by a former member of the Alliance Party. In fact, it may be an existing member, but it is someone who was a councillor for the Alliance Party for many years.

Then, of course, compounding all of that, we have the City Hall decision. The status quo in this Building was accepted, as was the status quo in Belfast City Hall. Republicans and nationalists wanted to break that status quo. Of course, who does the Alliance Party side with? It sides with the republicans and, indeed, the nationalists. It made that anti-British, anti-unionist, partisan, sectarian decision. It can no longer take on the bastion of a non-sectarian, non-partisan party after its decision in the City Hall. As I travel round other parts of the United Kingdom and, indeed, other countries, I see their national flag flying on their city hall in their capital city, but not in Belfast, because the Alliance Party signed up with Sinn Féin and the SDLP to remove the national flag —

Mr Speaker: All remarks should be made through the Chair.

Mr Poots: — from the City Hall for 95% of the time. Then we get —

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. In the spirit of other Members correcting the record, in Belfast City Hall, the SDLP and Sinn Féin backed an Alliance Party compromise around the flying of the flag on 17 days, as is applied under Department for Culture, Media and Sport guidance right across the UK. The Alliance Party did not back a motion from either the SDLP or Sinn Féin.

Mr Poots: And it treated the public with contempt by ignoring the consultation that took place, in which 90% of people said not to touch it. Now we are left to pick up the pieces, Mr Speaker, and we have to establish a unionist forum to attempt to pick up those pieces where others have made a mess.

In recent days, we have heard the sanctification of Short Strand residents. The people of Cluan Place may have a somewhat different point of view, having suffered violence exerted upon them, week in, week out, day in, day out.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Poots: It was quite evident on Saturday where the violence was coming from. The stones were coming from the Short Strand community. We need to reflect and bring our communities together, not seek to further divide them.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. I rise, as my colleague Mitchel McLaughlin did, to support the motion. In supporting it and in all Members contributing to it, it is essential that we seek to return to the hope and commitment that was provided by the Good Friday Agreement and the massive endorsement of that agreement by the people right across this island. It is important that we return to the spirit and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement. It reminds me — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: It reminds me that representatives of the unionist community have been telling people like me for many years that we are entitled to our aspirations. I have often said that I have no interest —

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Maskey: I will not give way to any Member, so as not to cause offence, and I say that to my own party colleagues as well. I will just offend everybody from the outset. On that basis, and with your indulgence, Cheann Comhairle, I say that it is important that we recognise that the Good Friday Agreement was not about endorsing someone's aspirations. I repeat that I am not remotely interested in whether anybody agrees that I am entitled to have aspirations. I have no aspirations; I have political objectives, and I have rights. Those rights and those political objectives are endorsed by the Good Friday Agreement.

Where I think that the motion falls a bit short is that it talks about the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement, but there is also the letter of the agreement. The agreement was not just a glossy brochure; it was a historical agreement. It was a major compromise from all sides, and, as my colleague Mitchel McLaughlin has already said, he and many of his colleagues, myself included, went up and down the length of the country supporting and promoting the Good Friday Agreement to colleagues and people in our community who saw it as a compromise and as a risk and saw it as not fulfilling all our political objectives. However, they bought into the argument that the Good Friday Agreement, providing what it does, enshrined in law a human rights and equality-based society, which was inclusive in a way that it had never been before. A framework agreement was provided for an end of conflict/state repression — call it whatever you want to call it, and I accept that we will have different interpretations of what happened in the past.

As I have said, the Good Friday Agreement has a lot of components to it. It enshrines the human rights and equality underpinning of everything that we do, including in places such as this House. It deals with the constitution, but I remind Members that not only does it deal with the current status of the North of Ireland, but it deals with it on the basis of the all-Ireland dimension. That is a very important part of the constitutional arrangements that we are now dealing with. People need to understand that unless we deal with all those elements of the Good Friday Agreement, we will fail on the promise and the hope of the Good Friday Agreement and the agreements that have been reached between the various parties and Governments in intervening years.

The Good Friday Agreement is underpinned by the principles of parity of esteem. That is not a catchphrase. How do we develop parity of esteem? I would argue that all the party leaders around this Chamber need to commit themselves today. I am fearful that, if I were listening to this debate from outside the House, I would have to work out, as a member of the public, whether I have any more confidence at the end of the debate about what is going to happen on our streets in the days, weeks and months ahead, or whether I am less confident by what I have heard in the Chamber.

I urge Members to recommit themselves to let us deliver on parity of esteem for all our citizens, particularly when people are talking about flags and emblems. The Good Friday Agreement commits us to making sure that we

protect and respect everybody's identity. That means flags, symbols and emblems. If we do not treat each other with mutual respect, as a society we will not go forward, and we will not be enshrining or living up to the hope and prospects of the Good Friday Agreement.

I urge all Members to send out a very clear message to the citizens out there, whom we all collectively represent, that we have a better way than what is currently unfolding on our streets. What is unfolding on our streets is a downward spiral to more violence. Someone is going to get seriously injured or lose their life. In here, we have a responsibility to direct what is going on out there into a political agreement. The only way to get a political agreement —

Mr Speaker: Time is up.

Mr Maskey: — is for party leaders to sit down together and agree to hammer one out, give leadership to people and face down those in our community who are attacking the peace process on a day-to-day basis.

11.30 am

Mr Speaker: Your time has gone.

Mr Maskey: Show leadership.

Mr Givan: In the debate, it is important that we refer to the wording of the motion. I am disappointed that the Member who has just spoken did not deal with the furore around his comments. The motion is explicit about condemning acts of violence, committing to peace and all of that. What did the Member say that he would do if he lived in the Short Strand? He can correct the quote, if I am wrong. I will certainly give way to him. He said that, given what has been happening in the Short Strand, if he lived there and his property was being attacked, he would be out throwing stones as well.

Mr Maskey: Will the Member give way?

Mr Givan: I will give way to the Member.

Mr Maskey: I am very happy to clarify that. I want to make it very clear. As I said to Mr Nesbitt, people should not be misquoting anybody. Last night, in a debate with John Kyle, a representative from east Belfast, I made it very, very clear that unless people stand up and identify their problems, you will not deal with it. I made that very clear.

I would defer to Mr Poots. His party colleagues sitting beside him commended him last year for shooting at people who, he said, were attacking his home. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: Shooting at people who were attacking his home. I made it very clear. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: I do not want to see one person throw a stone either into the Short Strand or from the Short Strand. If anybody in the Short Strand wants to stone another Protestant family's home, they are not doing it in my name, the name of my party or the people of the Short Strand. I am making it very, very clear. I do not want one stone — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: — thrown. However — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Maskey: — you cannot fault a family who have no option other than to defend their home — as Mr Poots did last year. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member who had the Floor gave away the Floor. *[Interruption.]* Order. It is up to the Member who has the Floor to decide to take an intervention or not to take an intervention. He invited the intervention. Let us be clear.

Mr Poots: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Mr Maskey made an assertion about something that he knows nothing about. His assertion is wholly and completely wrong. He has also made that assertion on radio. He should be very careful about what he is stating.

Mr Speaker: The Member has that on the record.

Mr Givan: I am not clear, even still, whether the Member has said —

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

Mr Givan: I appreciate that.

What I heard was more a justification for his comments. We need to be unequivocal: violence is wrong, from wherever it comes and under whatever circumstances. That is the position that we have. I invite the parties opposite, and particularly that Member, to reiterate that that is the position that they hold. If the Member is going to make that unequivocal statement, I am happy to give way to him. I note that he did not take the opportunity.

We cannot support the final part of the motion about the Belfast Agreement. The Belfast Agreement is one of the reasons why people are so aggravated, annoyed and are out on the streets, which is why we cannot support that. I note that Mr Nesbitt clarified what he meant by the “spirit” of the Belfast Agreement. In that context, I accept what he said. However, we are wholly opposed to the letter of the Belfast Agreement, which the Members opposite have said that we should accept. It was wrong to release prisoners. That was wrong. That is why people on the streets are saying, “Look what they got through the Belfast Agreement.” It was wrong. It was wrong for people to be put into government — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member must be heard. The Member has the Floor.

Mr Givan: It was wrong for people to be put into government with no decommissioning and no commitment to supporting the rule of law and the police. That is what happened under the Belfast Agreement. This party changed that through the St Andrews Agreement — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Givan: — a decommissioned IRA and a party that was prepared to say that it supported the rule of law and the police.

Mr Humphrey: It is interesting that the Members across the way, the republican and nationalist parties, laughed at the comments that the Member just made. It is no surprise to those of us on these Benches that the people who would laugh at what he has just said are the people who would name a children’s play park after a gunman and a murderer.

Mr Givan: I thank the Member for that intervention.

Let us be clear about the narrative of where we are in respect of all this. The St Andrews Agreement changed the political structures and the landscape in which we operate. The Belfast Agreement was fundamentally flawed, and we wholly opposed it. Indeed, the spirit of that agreement led to things such as 50:50 recruitment — the legal discrimination of the Protestant community. The St Andrews Agreement changed that. That is why recruitment of custody officers to the Prison Service is based solely on merit. That is why over 70% of recruits come from the Protestant community. Under the Belfast Agreement-style Patten report, that would not have been the case. So, the St Andrews Agreement has changed the way in which we and those structures operate.

Others who have created the tensions that exist include the Prime Minister, David Cameron, who apologised for what happened around Pat Finucane. What I hear is an apologist for how the security forces defended our country. Those people exploit a particular narrative that republicans want to portray, which is that they were the heroes and the security forces the bad guys. The Prime Minister is pandering. I note that Raymond McCartney nods his head in agreement. That is no surprise. The Prime Minister panders to that particular narrative. That is wrong, and that is why people out there are agitated.

We also have an Irish Prime Minister saying that he wants a public inquiry into Pat Finucane’s murder. He will not, however, admit to how the Republic of Ireland armed the Provisional IRA and supported it to carry out its 30-year terrorist campaign.

You can then understand why underlying tensions exist in the unionist and loyalist community. That is something that this party will, quite rightly, expose. We will come alongside those people and support them in tackling, peacefully and politically, those underlying problems that are creating the tensions that we have today.

Mr Speaker: The Member’s time is up.

Mr Kinahan: I am very pleased to speak today, particularly in trying to return to the spirit of the Belfast Agreement. The Ulster Unionist Party is absolutely clear that the motion is the correct one. I hope that everyone is listening to everyone else’s ideas and points, because that is the only way to go forward.

In Northern Ireland, we have seen horrific scenes of rioting and violence during the past five weeks. We need political leadership today. The Ulster Unionists are providing just that, with others, through the Unionist Forum and this debate. Today, we are offering all the parties the opportunity to debate and discuss the issues, so please listen to each other.

The Assembly should have no difficulty committing to:

“the principles of inclusivity, mutual respect, peace and democracy”.

However, that is the easy part. Actions from all of us will speak louder than words. But in terms of this motion, Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Alliance Party forcing through taking down the flag over our capital city without community consensus was wrong.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No. Let me carry on.

The Alliance Party leader described that as a victory. That was wrong. In terms of that motion, it was wrong for Sinn Féin's Jim McVeigh to state that it was a process towards total removal of the flag. Gerry Kelly's fuelling the fire by suggesting the renaming of the Royal Victoria Hospital was wrong. I raise those points, because we have to get back to the spirit of the agreement. None of those actions is within the principles that are outlined in today's motion.

Mr B McCrea: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kinahan: No. Not at the moment. *[Interruption.]* The Union flag is meant to represent everyone in the United Kingdom through its crosses: St George for England; St Andrew for Scotland; St David for Wales; and St Patrick for Ireland. Turning it into a political tool is wrong.

Before Christmas, I knocked on as many doors as I could in Ballyclare and Antrim to hear people's views. Whether they were Catholic or Protestant, their message was clear: the flag's flying for 365 days is not a problem, so please fly it; the protests are the problem, so please do not.

Mr Dickson: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Can the Member describe the Union flag to us once again? Today is the first time that I have ever heard that there was a cross of St David on the Union flag. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. I have been very liberal with points of order. However, I must say to the Member that that is not, by any means, a point of order, no matter how he might describe it.

Mr Kinahan: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. As I understand it, one of the differences in shape of the white comes from the Welsh side, but I will happily have that clarified later.

I want to go back to this point. It seems that the comment that Northern Ireland — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Kinahan: — is not as divided as politicians make out is rather true. As a result of so many wrongs, we have protests. My party leader has made it absolutely clear that, because they are associated with violence, the protests must stop. We cannot be clearer than this: violence must stop, and we unreservedly condemn all of it. The economic cost to traders, we are told, is some £14 million, and the cost of policing has reached £7 million. Both costs are rising. Therefore, we call for the violence to end and for protests to come off the streets.

If we reflect on things, we see that all of us here have somehow managed to create three sectarian divisions — unionist, nationalist and neither — all of which fail to respect others, look down their nose at one another and think that they are better than others. None is; no one is. Let us drop that, and try to make things better for everyone. The Assembly needs leadership to get back to the spirit of the Belfast Agreement and to start working with consensus, not enforced division. I see the worst of that in education, where, at the moment, there is no effort whatsoever to find an agreed way forward.

We have no issue with the DUP amendment, as the principle of consent is integral to it.

The financial situation in the Republic, the recent census figures —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost gone.

Mr Kinahan: — and current global trends show that changing the status quo is off the agenda. I accept and welcome Sinn Féin's earlier comment. Let us all learn from today, take the points on board and go forward.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I have to say that I find it very disappointing that the DUP is seeking to stand back from agreements that have been reached and voted for right across this island. Our society wants peace and change, and the irony of that situation is that the people who are out protesting need change most. Nobody should be under any illusion about how much change we have had since the historic agreements were reached. Those are good agreements that our people support regardless of their political affiliation or which flag they choose as their own. How much change has happened? There has been change socially and economically. There has been change in policing and justice. There has been educational change, and there has been change — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — in equality for differing cultural traditions. Nobody should be afraid of change, and nobody should laugh at it. What we are seeing, through the protests —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not give way.

What we are seeing is an irrational, illogical response. As we know and as the Alliance Party pointed out, the position on the flag was a compromise. The flag is flown on designated days here at Stormont. The unionist parties forgot to tell their protesters that. They forgot to explain that, in agreements that are reached, you have to reach compromises. What they have been doing is pretending that things are the same as before. Things are not the same, and it is better for everyone that they are not. What the unionist parties are doing is scurrying around, hiding and trying to bluster through their contradictions. We heard Edwin Poots and Gregory Campbell blustering today, because they forgot to tell their electorate that there is going to be change. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: We have told the people who vote for us that there will be change. We are engaging with people and saying that that will mean compromises. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not debate across the Chamber. The Member has the Floor.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. They have forgotten about the people who voted for them and who have been left behind by their abysmal failure to deal with the education issue. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: They can laugh. Listen to the laughter. Yet, Gregory Campbell — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

11.45 am

Ms Ruane: Gregory Campbell asked what Sinn Féin will do to deal with Protestant underachievement. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I will tell you what Sinn Féin will do: we will continue to bring about change so that the young people who are currently out rioting get an education rather than being left behind by the policies of the DUP and — yes, Mr Nesbitt — the UUP — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: You have failed the young people. You have failed to look at the underlying causes, and you talk now with crocodile tears about educational underachievement and disadvantage.

Mr Nesbitt: Will the Member give way?

Ms Ruane: No, I will not give way. You all had your opportunities.

Mr Nesbitt: Not as Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not —

Ms Ruane: You all had your opportunities.

Mr Nesbitt: Not as the Minister.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist. It is quite obvious that the Member has no intention of giving way. Let us move on. The Member must be heard.

Ms Ruane: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle.

I am a member of the Policing Board. The PSNI has failed to act appropriately in relation to — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — the illegal protests. It has failed to act. I said that to Matt Baggott last Thursday when he came to the Policing Board. It failed to act appropriately when hate crime was committed against a party in the House. That is wrong, and it should not happen. I join all colleagues in the House in condemning hate crime against the Alliance Party and, indeed, any party.

Mike Nesbitt waxed lyrical about the agreement. He talked about reconciliation yet tried —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — to proceed to say that we are all — I forget his exact words — British citizens or UK or whatever he called it citizens — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I am an Irish citizen. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: The tens of thousands of people who vote for me and my party are Irish citizens. Mitchel McLaughlin —

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member is persisting in trying to get in on —

Mr Nesbitt: It is a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr Nesbitt: Well, you will judge that, sir.

Mr Speaker: Let us see whether it is a point of order.

Mr Nesbitt: I believe that the Member said that she was confused. For the record, I said that the agreement settled the position of Northern Ireland — the country; the physical shape of Northern Ireland — as part of the United Kingdom. I made no reference to the people not being allowed to call themselves Irish. That is just as a point of order and clarification.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has it on the record. Let us move on.

Mr Nesbitt: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker. I very much appreciate you taking that.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: I welcome the fact that Mike Nesbitt has clarified that.

Sinn Féin will continue to support the agreement. We will not allow anti-peace process —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time has almost gone.

Ms Ruane: — people to destroy what we have all worked so hard for. The attacks on the Short Strand have to stop. Sinn Féin is committed to ongoing change — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — for the people who vote for us and for the people — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Ms Ruane: — who vote for you, because you are failing in your leadership.

Mr McDevitt: The House, as I said before Christmas, is again letting down our people. We exist, it is worth remembering, only because of the Good Friday Agreement. We owe our authority and mandate to sit here and rule to the people who voted yes to that agreement. Although I respect the right of people to come to the House as opponents of the agreement, they need to think carefully about the moral authority to sit in office and try to have it each way.

There is no denying the fact that who we are and where we are going will be defined by nothing other than the will of our people. The architecture or the road map — whatever you want to call it — is laid out in the agreement. What does the agreement say? It says that we shall go forward as equals, we shall respect one another, we shall cherish our diversity, and we shall uphold the right of everyone to be who they want to be.

Mr Nesbitt said that the Union flag is everyone's flag in this region. That is not true. Consenting, as we do, as nationalists, to this region remaining part of the United Kingdom so long as its people wish it to is not becoming British. In fact, the agreement says that we do not need to be British to consent, because we have the right to be who we want to be. I respect and really cherish that principle. I just wish that everyone enjoying the benefits of office in the House —

Mr Campbell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: In a second, Mr Campbell.

I wish that everyone enjoying the benefits of office in the House would do the same. Before I let Mr Campbell in, I pose a simple question. Mr McGuinness and Mr Robinson enjoy the great privilege of being the joint leaders of our region. When will we see them together? When will they step out and show collective leadership, condemn the violence, call for an end to the protests and set a positive example? When?

Mr Campbell: I respect the Member's right and that of anyone else in the House or outside of it to be Irish. There is nothing about the Union flag that demands that anyone who lives under it must be British. If the Member says he is Irish, I accept that. Does he accept that that is what we are talking about when we talk about terms of inclusivity?

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

Mr McDevitt: I thank Mr Campbell for that contribution. I do not believe that any of us who enjoy an Irish identity see the Union flag in that way in constitutional terms. We see it used on our streets and in our council chambers. We see it used politically in this part of the United Kingdom, which, as Mr Campbell would like to remind us, we remain in, and in this part of Ireland, which is a geographical fact. We see it used in every way except the way that he suggests. In fact, the First Minister came to the House only yesterday to tell us and to condemn the fact that it was being used in a way in which it is not intended. When something is hijacked and used against what it is meant to defend, people should understand that it can become a dangerous symbol as well as a very positive thing.

Let us seek out compromise and go forward understanding that there is no victory that is ever going to be a solution. Let us show some solidarity with the people of inner east Belfast, who are living under the jackboot of paramilitaries turned criminals turned God knows what. Let us have some sympathy with what I am sure is the vast majority of people in places like Pitt park and the lower Newtownards Road, who are sick to the teeth of what is being done, allegedly, in their name. Rather than condemnation, let us have some solidarity with the nationalist community in the Short Strand, who are also sick to the teeth of what is being done against them. If there are individuals in that community who are stupid enough to retaliate, let us call them out for what they are. However, we should not condemn and play politics with working-class communities.

People have enjoyed office in this place for the guts of a decade. The question I would ask those people is what they have been doing during that decade. If we need —

Lord Morrow: Will the Member give way?

Mr McDevitt: I will give way in a second. What have they been doing, if we need 42 nights of violence for them to come to the House and tell us that there is a problem? What did they go into government for? Was it to enjoy the privilege of office or to genuinely change the lives of everyone?

Lord Morrow: I thank the Member for giving way. He has waxed eloquently about giving leadership. Yes, leadership is so important, particularly in the times that we live in. He must surely be aware that the leader of my party

has called continuously for the protests to end. I want to challenge Mr McDevitt directly. He sat in the Chamber and tried to defend the indefensible. If he thinks that there is nothing offensive about naming play parks after convicted terrorists, I fail to understand where he is coming from. He needs to give some leadership.

Mr McDevitt: The SDLP knows when it makes a mistake, and it will fess up to that mistake. The question is whether other parties in the House that have made grave, serious, unjustifiable mistakes have the courage to own up to those mistakes today.

The agreement sent us here. The agreement will keep us here.

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is gone.

Mr McDevitt: We either start living it or we lose the opportunity that it gave us in the first place. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Newton: I speak from an east Belfast perspective, where most of the difficulties have been concentrated. Immediately after Christmas, east Belfast faced a major problem with the attack on a police officer by a dissident bomb, which could have wiped out the police officer and his entire family. East Belfast is bleeding at the moment and bleeding quite severely. Traders are suffering. Residents are suffering. Cars are being hijacked, and attempts have been made to hijack buses. Many of our young people are ending up with a criminal record. We all recognise the right to a peaceful protest. That is ingrained in our society and is part of our democratic rights, but we need to move from that position and what has evolved into difficult riot situations. We need to see an end to the riots and the violence. However, we know what the spark was that created the problems that we now face. Much has been made by those on the other side of the Chamber about leadership. We need to talk about leadership, because it has not been shown by Sinn Féin, the SDLP or the Alliance Party.

Mr Dickson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Newton: No. I have only five minutes to wind up on the amendment.

As elected representatives, we are all called on to make collective decisions for the benefit of all. In that capacity — for the benefit of all — they were found wanting. You allowed party politics to eclipse the interests of the people. Mitchel McLaughlin indicated that he accepted the status quo of Northern Ireland being part of the UK. It is just a pity that his colleagues in Belfast City Council could not have accepted the status quo of the flag flying for 103 years without giving offence to anyone. It is just a pity that, when there was an established system in Belfast City Council where harmony and co-operation existed across the council chamber, Sinn Féin could not allow the status quo to continue. Rather, they purged the council of those who were seen to be too comfortable. They radicalised the council by putting in place those from an IRA background, one of whom is a former leader of the IRA in the Maze.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Newton: No. I have only five minutes.

When our elected representatives make decisions, they must assess the potential outcome and effect of

those decisions. In this, they failed. You cannot blame unionists for the bad decisions of the Alliance Party. It was the Alliance Party that was the key to the whole thing. Everyone knows that the Alliance Party could have ensured that the recommendation of the council committee to remove the flag failed, but, instead, for party political reasons —

Mr Lyttle: We did.

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Newton: — for party political reasons, they enforced the removal of the flag, and they got support for Sinn Féin in this, as Sinn Féin stated that it was doing this as part of a process. The Alliance Party has integrated itself in that process with Sinn Féin. They have been part of the process with Sinn Féin — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Newton: Now, a blind man on a galloping horse could see that removing the national flag from the main building — *[Interruption.]*

Dr McDonnell: It has not been removed.

Lord Morrow: It is clear that it has been removed.

Mr Speaker: Order. Members should not debate across the Chamber. The Member has the Floor and should be heard.

Mr Newton: Removing the flag from the main municipal building in Northern Ireland after 103 years was going to cause a reaction. For the benefit of Mr Lyttle, Mr McLaughlin and Alasdair McDonnell, let us nail the lie once and for all: the equality impact assessment —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost over.

Mr Newton: — did not recommend the removal of the Union flag. It was only the honeyed words — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Mr Newton: It did not recommend the removal of the Union flag. It was the process that the three parties entered into that removed the Union flag.

12.00 noon

Mr Copeland: I rise to wind and, I hope, not wind up, the debate. I rise against the backdrop of what has happened over the past period of time. I rise painfully aware that the words that are spoken in this Chamber are not always what is heard outside this Chamber. In winding up a debate, generally you refer to the positions put forward previously, but, on this occasion, I feel that the Hansard report exists, the television coverage exists and Members have put forward the position of their parties. There is little point in me ploughing a field that has been well and truly ploughed.

My view is that the motion tabled by my party gave the House, parties and other Members in it a flag to rally around, a flag that restated basic principles that all of us, personally and corporately, accept. At one stage, I felt that we were not going to get a reasoned debate but simply a repetition of entrenched positions and

“the dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone”

re-emerging to the good of no one. We represent people who have suffered a shared history, endure a shared

present and, if we are not careful, will be condemned to a dismal shared future.

I am possibly going on to dangerous ground here, and I ask you, Sir, to bear with me. I listened to the contribution from Mr Maskey last night, and, if I was being honest, I would say that I understood it, because I have felt it myself. I have felt it as stones rained into Pitt park. I have felt it when bricks and petrol bombs bounced off the roofs in Duke Street and Thistle Court. I have felt it in Cluan Place. Once again, we see an attempt not to look at the solution but to look to who is to blame.

I fully understand that two people from diverse political backgrounds could look at a particular situation and form two viewpoints. I am aware of comments made by community representatives on the Newtownards Road last night about who started it. I was disturbed to a degree by some of the coverage of last Saturday's events, which basically wrote the script that was enacted last night, and last night wrote the script that will be enacted tonight. The events of last Saturday were not honestly, in my opinion, as described by Mr Maskey. There is CNN television coverage; I spoke to people who were there. It was, at its heart, a mistake that saw protesters put along a road that they had never indicated any preference or desire to go along, and they were attacked. That sense of being attacked was compounded, in my view, by the Chief Constable issuing an apology to the residents of the Short Strand who suffered damage to their homes. He was quite entitled to do that. I would apologise to anyone who suffers damage to their home. The issue was that he did not admit the role that, in my view, the policing of that operation had in the events that unfurled.

I am talking purely in terms of unionism, because I am aware that there has been a good deal of criticism from nationalism, which I can accept, that unionism is looking into itself. These problems, in my view, can, in some respects, only be solved by the unionist community looking at itself. I believe and say again that a fundamental difficulty at the core and the heart of this perception that the world is against them, the tide is against them and history is against them has its roots in the Belfast Agreement, the St Andrews amendments and, indeed, the Hillsborough agreement. That whole process, no matter how cleverly couched, was one of necessary political manoeuvring. I was not a member of the Ulster Unionist Party at that time. I can stand up and say that I voted against the Belfast Agreement. I did so not because I differed from its aspirations but because I did not think that it could be delivered. I never imagined that it would get this far, where people in this Chamber, including me, who would happily have murdered each other could set aside those differences of the past in the hope of delivering a better future for all our people.

Unionists, whether nationalism and republicanism accepts it or not, viewed all that period of negotiation as a settlement and an end to 3,500 deaths, which was a fairly heavy bill to pay for any settlement, and to 40 years of the destruction of the infrastructure. They viewed it as a settlement. Republicans and nationalists — I have to confess that they were pretty open about it — viewed it as a process along a series of stepping stones towards an objective that could not be obtained by murder, mayhem, destruction and firearms but by persuasion. With respect, it is my view that the nature of the continued progress

along that series of stepping stones is creating the ground for discontent, the protest that flows from it and the violence that flows from all those ingredients.

I do not set myself up as intelligent or politically gifted. I always try to tell the truth as I understand it to be. I have no answers, but I, at least, have the questions from which we may be able to derive the answers.

I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your handling of the debate. I sincerely wish that, at some stage at some interface in Belfast, someone will appear who is capable of maintaining order in the way in which you did. I cannot overstate the impact on community relations and, particularly, on the relationship between sections of the unionist community and the police. Nationalists and republicans may well have some empathy with this, because we are in danger of placing the police in a position of being seen as imposing the authority and the will of a system of government as opposed to upholding the law. That is very, very dangerous ground to get into.

The debate itself, given the viewpoints from which Members spoke, was understandable and reasonable. Again, however, I cannot overstate the urgency of each of us thinking about how what we do looks to the other. History is in danger of repeating itself.

Mr Lyttle: Will the Member give way?

Mr Copeland: I have finished.

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I should acknowledge that I found the debate very interesting. Clearly, Members were conscious that there is an escalating and deteriorating situation on the streets, and I appreciate that no one here attempted to make that situation any worse.

I wish to raise an issue that arises from the circumstances of the rules of the House in relation to petitions of concern. Under the current arrangements, we would be unable to make a decision on this very important debate until next Monday. I am concerned about the escalating situation and the upcoming weekend. I wonder, given that the Business Committee is meeting under your auspices at 12.30 pm, whether it would be possible for the Whips to agree to suspend Standing Orders and return to this matter this afternoon so that we can decide on the motion and the amendment before us, so that there is a clear statement from the Assembly.

There were many references to leadership. Given what is happening on our streets, I think that there would be criticism if the Assembly could not make a decision on this matter this afternoon.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member raises a very important point of order. The Business Committee will meet at 12.30 pm. Let me put it to the Business Committee and come back to the House. The Member will understand that we need to get agreement from all the Whips on the Business Committee to do what he is suggesting.

Mr Allister: Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. Could the Business Committee also look at the fact that, on this day when business is extremely light, it was totally inappropriate, I would suggest, to have restricted this debate to a mere 90 minutes? The consequence of that was that only Members from Executive parties were afforded the opportunity to speak. Therefore, this House,

which claims to recognise disconnection between it and the community, in fact, returned to a situation of allowing only those who support the Executive to speak in a debate such as this.

Mr Speaker: The Member will know that it is the Business Committee that sets the time limit for debates in this Chamber. The Business Committee revisited that on 27 September after a request from Members who are single Members of parties in this House. However, it came to the conclusion that the timings should not be changed. I am very happy to raise it again with the Business Committee, which, as I said, sets the timings for debates. This matter has been raised with the Business Committee on several occasions, and it has decided not to make any changes to the lengths of debates in the Chamber.

Mr Humphrey: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. We, on these Benches, have heard what Mr McLaughlin said in relation to the Business Committee. If Sinn Féin and the SDLP are really genuine and sincere about this issue, why on earth did they put in a petition of concern?

Mr Speaker: That is another debate that can be had some other day.

Mr B McCrea: Further to Mr Allister's point of order, Mr Speaker. It is somewhat disappointing that there are four gentlemen here who would have liked to contribute. I take the Speaker's instruction that it is for the Business Committee. However, given that all the parties on the Business Committee are those whose Members have spoken, are there any other channels that we might advance down to see if it is possible to get the fullest representation of Members speaking in the Chamber?

Mr Speaker: The issue is about trying to reflect the balance of the House in the Chamber. That can sometimes be very difficult. The single Members of parties, who sit to my left at the back, do quite well when it comes to debates in the Chamber. The Clerks keep the figures, and those Members do quite well. If they were somewhere else, they would be very lucky if they got in every six months or at all. Single-Member parties need to be careful, because they do quite well. I am always very protective of the smaller parties in the Chamber.

As I said, this matter has already been raised in the Business Committee on a number of occasions. The Whips who are on the Business Committee will know that. The Business Committee has said unanimously that there should be no change. So, on the point of order that you raised, I say yes, there may be other channels that Members could follow to raise the issue, but the Business Committee has made its decision.

Mr Givan: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. It is useful for these issues to be raised. Yesterday, this party brought a matter of the day. Beyond the individual who brought it, this party, which has 38 Members, had one Member who spoke to it. The Alliance Party had two Members who spoke, and three of the Members in the corner beside the Alliance Party spoke. In looking at all of this, take into account what happened yesterday in the matter of the day.

Mr Speaker: That is the point that I was making earlier. On occasions, single-Member parties and independents do reasonably well. I really think that we should move on.

12.15 pm

Dr Farry: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. During Mr Copeland's winding-up speech, he said — I will try to paraphrase as accurately as possible — that if we were all honest, there were circumstances over the past 40 years in which we all, including himself, would have wanted to murder each other. It is important to clarify that he does not speak for me or my colleagues when he makes such comments, and I imagine that he does not speak for his own party, the Ulster Unionists, or many others in the House. Comments have quite rightly been made about concerns over Mr Maskey's remarks on UTV yesterday evening. I suggest that Mr Copeland's comments are equally alarming, and he should be given an opportunity to clarify the record.

Mr Speaker: Order. We are getting into a situation in which the debate is over, and Members want to make further speeches. We need to be careful. I will allow Mr Copeland to clarify the situation.

Mr Copeland: Thank you. If Members did not hear what I said, I will repeat what I said to the best of my ability. I said to Mr Maskey, many years ago before the agreements were signed, that it was interesting that he was sitting beside me and that I was sitting beside him. I will tell you exactly what I said to him: "For 40 years, you, I presume, because of the political party and the ethos that you come from, would have considered me, my family and those like us suitable candidates for murder." I said to his face that neither he nor his family would have received any sympathy from me had misfortune visited him in the middle of the night and left him dead. I felt that the fact that that had changed was progress. That was progress, and it is truthful. Anyone who thinks that, in the past 40 years, those sentiments did not exist is a fool.

Mr Speaker: Order. Hopefully, the Member has clarified the situation. Let us move on. *[Interruption.]* Order. Members should leave the Chamber in an orderly fashion. Let us have some dignity in and respect for the House.

Housing: Private Rented Sector Licensing 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 in which to propose and 10 minutes in which to make a winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes.

Mr Campbell: I beg to move

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to consider the introduction of a licensing scheme for landlords operating in the private rented sector.

I trust that this debate will not be as difficult to manage as the previous one. However, it is an important debate.

My party tabled the motion to allow the Minister to give serious consideration to something that we believe is required because of the changing nature of the — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order. Will Members please take their conversations outside? The Member has the Floor.

Mr Campbell: Thank you, Mr Speaker. It is required because of the changing nature of the housing stock in Northern Ireland.

Obviously, in recent years, because of the economic downturn and the banking difficulties, families and individuals have found it extremely difficult to obtain mortgages. That combination has led to an increase in rented properties. Not only the social housing sector but private sector landlords have also been thrown into the mix.

In researching for the debate, I discovered an interesting fact that I was not aware of: there are almost 150,000 residential properties in Northern Ireland available for rent. For those properties, there are between 50,000 and 60,000 landlords. That is obviously a significant quantity of properties and a significant number of individual landlords, some of whom act as a mini corporate group. However, many are individual landlords with maybe one or two properties.

The other issue is that many landlords find themselves as almost accidental landlords, because whether through an inheritance or a family issue, a property that they do not live in has come into their ownership. They then decide to rent it out, and, hey presto, they become a private sector landlord. Given that and its scale and size, we need to ensure that all those landlords are on a register, and I know that the Minister has done some considerable work on the registration process. However, as that develops through the year, we would like him to give consideration to a licensing scheme beyond that.

In doing a little research on the scheme in a wider context, I found that, in England, for example, lobby groups for landlord associations have given very clear indications that, in the context of the welfare reform that is going through this place as well as the rest of the UK, they would be dissatisfied to take some tenants. That will obviously create a difficulty for potential tenants who are seeking out properties. They may find suitable properties but find that the new legislation means that the landlord may be very reluctant to agree a tenancy because of how they may

want rent to be paid or because of other issues that affect both them and the tenant. That would create a difficulty if it were the case in Northern Ireland.

Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) are another issue that is quite prevalent in parts of Northern Ireland. That is particularly the case in urban areas, although it is not as prevalent in rural areas. We need to be clear about what statutory provision is to be required there. This is an open-ended proposal, because we have no hard and fast guidelines. I am sure that the Minister will elaborate a little in his response.

However, the balancing act is the essential prerequisite in what is required. We have to safeguard and protect tenants from potentially unscrupulous landlords. I am not suggesting that there are tens of thousands of them, because there are not, but there are some. At the same time, we have to try to make any registration scheme, which will hopefully evolve into licensing, not too bureaucratic so that landlords do not say, "There is no point in this, and I am going to opt out" and, therefore, create a further difficulty for someone else.

Mr F McCann: Will the Member give way?

Mr Campbell: Yes, I will.

Mr F McCann: The Member may have been Chair of the Social Development Committee when the debate about registration of landlords started. However, during all the debates here on the matter, most people talked about light-touch regulations or light-touch legislation. In fact, in England and Scotland, they say that there has to be robust legislation to ensure that the majority of landlords abide by the rules and regulations.

You mentioned houses in multiple occupation, and there is a £50,000 fine sitting there for people who do not register. Although the talk is about maybe 10,000 HMOs, it could be double that, and they could be completely ignoring it. So, you need a good, firm, regulated system to ensure that they register.

Mr Campbell: The Member makes a very relevant point. There has to be legislation robust enough to protect tenants, but we have to safeguard to prevent any overly bureaucratic system that leaves tenants in the position of not being bothered with it because it is too time-consuming or whatever. That would offload a whole series of properties to other landlords, and that might only compound the problems that the Member mentioned.

This will be a case of trying to ensure that the balance is got right. Yes, I agree that the legislation must be robust enough to achieve that. We are asking the Minister whether he will consider this important issue. It is an escalating problem that shows no sign of diminishing in the near future because of the downturn in the economy and because the banking system is not really freeing up moneys for mortgages at the moment. In any case, employees do not have the available cash to go down the purchasing route, although we are starting to see the beginnings of an improvement there.

I know that the SDLP had a view about any licensing system. We are content to hear the Minister's view and for him to give the scheme serious consideration. In the House's process of consultation through the Department, with the Committee and with tenants and landlords, we

can hopefully arrive at a much better conclusion than that which exists at present.

Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has arranged to meet immediately on the lunchtime suspension. I propose therefore, by leave of the Assembly, to suspend the sitting until 2.00 pm. The first item of business when the House returns will be Question Time.

The debate stood suspended.

The sitting was suspended at 12.26 pm.

On resuming (Mr Deputy Speaker [Mr Dallat] in the Chair) —

2.00 pm

Oral Answers to Questions

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Mr Deputy Speaker: I am pleased that the Minister has arrived.

Adoption

1. **Mr Agnew** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he intends to challenge the High Court ruling that unmarried couples and people in civil partnerships should be allowed to adopt. (AQO 3135/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): Yes. The notice of appeal was served on the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and was lodged in court on behalf of the Department on 11 December 2012. At this stage, the date for the appeal hearing is unknown. I have instructed departmental lawyers to request an expedited hearing.

Mr Agnew: Given that we have over 2,500 looked-after children in Northern Ireland currently and that the outcomes for children in care are poor in many cases with regard to educational achievement, risk of offending and risk of suicide, will the Minister tell me what evidence he has that a child growing up with gay parents in a loving family home would somehow be worse off, considering especially that gay individuals can adopt?

Mr Poots: Of course, we are always looking at the best interests of the children, and that is why we want to bring new adoption legislation to the Assembly. We are currently engaged in that course of work. It is with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, and I hope that, in due course, it will be brought before the Executive quite soon. So, in all of this, we want to move things forward.

In the course of that piece of work, a public consultation was held that elicited the views of just short of 1,050 people and organisations. Of that number, over 1,000 of those persons and organisations were opposed to changing the law away from the existing stance. I see the Member shaking his head. He may want to listen to the views of 3% or 4% of the community and ignore the views of 95% or 96%, but he would do well to pay attention to what the community is actually saying.

Ms S Ramsey: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The Minister mentioned that he hopes to introduce the adoption Bill sooner rather than later. Will he outline whether he has had any indication or legal advice that the current legal process — whether or not he will appeal — could or would hold up the timetable for the adoption Bill?

Mr Poots: I do not think that it should. We can proceed with the adoption Bill. After all, we need to be very clear about this. When it comes to these issues, the House will make the laws, and the courts will interpret them; not the other way around. It is for the House to make the

decisions. We are the elected body of the people. We make laws, and we should not give up that position of making the laws. That is something that the people have given to us and not to other organisations. We should make the law, and the courts should interpret it.

Ms Lo: Does the Minister agree with me that there are so many children still waiting to be adopted that it is a good idea to widen the pool and have more people able to adopt children?

Mr Poots: No, I do not agree with her at all. We already have a very wide pool, and the number of children waiting to be adopted in Northern Ireland is not considerable compared with other areas. First and foremost, we always have to act in the best interests of the child. I will always act in the interests of the child. It is not a human right to adopt; people need to get that very clear. We must always ensure that the human rights of the child are ensured. We will look at all the issues relating to foster care, care in homes and all those things. We need to reform the system, move it forward and advance it. People can get up on a particular hobby horse, but they do not provide solutions. I am looking for solutions.

Ms Brown: I thank the Minister for his answers thus far. How will the new legislative proposals tackle delays in the adoption process?

Mr Poots: Currently, our adoptive process is slower than is the case in England, for example. We believe that we can shave eight months off the adoptive process if we carry out the legislative process that we are looking at. Clearly, there is work to be done. The process needs to be adapted, amended and changed, and that is the course of work that we are looking at. We will not be distracted by other issues in moving this forward in the best interests of the children.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Members, please note that question 8 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

Community Pharmacies

2. **Mr Molloy** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety why his Department withdrew its appeal on the outcome of the judicial review of community pharmacies. (AQO 3136/11-15)

6. **Mr Dunne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made on securing a new contract for community pharmacists. (AQO 3140/11-15)

Mr Poots: With your permission, Mr Deputy Speaker, I will answer questions 2 and 6 together.

I decided to appeal the judicial review decision on community pharmacies as I was advised that the judgement could have a wider effect across government, particularly with regard to the regulatory impact assessment point. I am now advised that, to date, there has been no collateral difficulty across government and that it is more appropriate that the issue be resolved through the administrative rather than the legal process. I also advised the Assembly on 13 March 2012 that my Department and the HSC Board would continue to engage with representatives of Community Pharmacy on the way forward. Intensive negotiations led by my permanent secretary continued during the year, culminating in an accommodation that allowed my Department to withdraw

its appeal and CPNI to withdraw its cross appeal. The lodging of an appeal did not impede negotiations. It created a breathing space that allowed negotiations to continue to break the cycle of litigation and allow a final accommodation to be reached.

Negotiations are continuing with Community Pharmacy representatives on a new contract. Good progress has been made in some areas, but work is still required in other areas to support the evolving role of community pharmacists in the new world of reformed health and social care services as outlined in 'Transforming Your Care'.

Mr Molloy: I thank the Minister for his reply so far. What costs are involved in that type of process, where an appeal is lodged and then withdrawn? In this case, has he any idea of what the costs will be and who will cover them?

Mr Poots: As I understand it, we will cover our own costs and CPNI will cover the costs of its cross appeal. What is significant is the amount of money that the Department will save. This litigation has been going on for a considerable time, but we believe that, in 2012-13, £12 million to £20 million will be saved for the public purse, and that money will be available to spend in other parts of the HSC.

Mr Gardiner: Given the trust and the wide access that community pharmacies have in their local community and the significant role that they could play in preventative health and early intervention, does the Minister accept that they should be given a vital partnership in improving the health of the community?

Mr Poots: I absolutely agree with the Member. Pharmacy has a key role, and I strongly support community pharmacies delivering further for the HSC system and ensuring that they can play that key role. There are so many pharmacies on our streets. They are one of the most accessible areas of healthcare that we currently have.

Mr Deputy Speaker: This was a grouped question. Apologies to Gordon Dunne, who should have been called second.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister for his answers. Does he recognise the financial pressures that pharmacists are under at present? In many cases, they are using their own funding to pay bills.

Mr Poots: I do. I know that there has been a degree of uncertainty, and I hope that the agreement that has been reached will help bring that uncertainty to a conclusion.

We have all faced difficult times recently. Every area of government has endured cuts. Many people in the private sector have endured cuts, and many people have had their hours reduced. People have to live with those consequences. Pharmacists are not immune to that, and they, too, will be able to have good business opportunities and continue with those business opportunities.

I recall Mr McCarthy, for example, standing here last year, bleating that pharmacists would close all over the country. In fact, there is one more pharmacist in Northern Ireland than there was last year. That is not a demonstration that pharmacies are closing all over the country.

Mr Durkan: Does the Minister acknowledge that, due to the financial pressures, as outlined by Mr Dunne, many community pharmacies are in an extremely precarious situation? What specific steps is the Minister going to take

to reassure those pharmacies that they have a sustainable future serving communities?

Mr Poots: I recognise that pharmacies are in a less profitable position. That is why we are working on the margin survey and why the courses of work that were set out by the previous court ruling are being carried out. There seems to be some reluctance on the part of CPNI about some of those things being done. The margin survey is absolutely essential in demonstrating what the profitability of pharmacies is and ensuring that we have pharmacies that are profitable. I cannot support businesses in making bad business decisions, nor can anybody else or any other Minister in the House. If people bought properties three or four years ago or at the height of the boom, it is not our responsibility in the Health Department to sustain those businesses, but we will ensure that pharmacies remain profitable and can continue to serve people on the streets across Northern Ireland.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Surgery

3. **Mr Flanagan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on children's paediatric surgery at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. (AQO 3137/11-15)

12. **Mr McDevitt** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of a two-site integrated all-island network in relation to paediatric congenital cardiac surgery. (AQO 3146/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr Speaker, I assume that Mr Flanagan is asking about paediatric cardiac surgery at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children, and, with your permission, I will answer questions 3 and 12 together.

You are aware that I asked the Health and Social Care Board, in association with the Public Health Agency, to establish a working group to consider future requirements for delivering a paediatric congenital cardiac surgery and interventional cardiology service for Northern Ireland. The working group has publicly consulted on a draft document for the commissioning specification, criteria and options for the future delivery of that service. The consultation included generic options for the future commissioning of the service from centres in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

The public consultation closed on 21 December 2012. Following analysis of the responses to the consultation document by the Health and Social Care Board, the working group is developing a draft framework to determine a preferred option for the future commissioning of the PCCS service. I expect to receive the draft framework from the Health and Social Care Board by the end of February for my approval. A preferred option for the future provision of the service will then be identified, and I will announce my decision on that.

Mr Flanagan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I remember the Minister speaking this morning about the decision to remove the flag from Belfast City Council and about how it was a disgrace that that council had ignored the public consultation. I have been contacted by very many passionate campaigners on this issue, and I pay tribute to them. Can the Minister give us an assurance that he and his Department will take on board the views of

those who responded to the public consultation and he will not just ignore it?

Mr Poots: Unlike previous Education Ministers, perhaps, and so forth, I did not ignore the views of the public when it came to providing the satellite radiotherapy centre at Altnagelvin or when it came to the MRI scanner, and I am listening very carefully to the views of the public on this issue.

Mr McDevitt: I am sure the House is united in understanding how sensitive an issue this is, particularly for the families concerned, and that it should be above whatever other politics we have in the House. Does the Minister remain open-minded to the preferred model, as I understand it, certainly from the patient point of view, which is a two-site integrated network on the island of Ireland? Has the Minister had the opportunity to have further conversations with Minister Reilly about that matter?

Mr Poots: We had extensive discussion on that model with Minister Reilly in December. There is work that has to be done on that model, and my civil servants and Minister Reilly's civil servants have been tasked with doing that. That course of work is being done. These are the issues that the House needs to be talking about. The nonsense that is happening on the streets out there needs to be dealt with, and we need to deal with these issues, because that is what matters to the public in Northern Ireland.

Mrs Overend: The consultation document did not give equal weighting to having a readily accessible paediatric surgery unit, as it did to other aspects contributing to a safe and sustainable service. Does the Minister accept that, if a child with an emergency heart condition is to receive life-saving treatment, they must be able to quickly and safely reach a surgical unit? Why was significant and equal weighting not given to accessibility?

Mr Poots: Accessibility is something that we will give due consideration to, but getting to the right unit is what is important for people. Generally, in healthcare, the fact that there is an expanse of water between us and the units in GB is a significant issue in that it is not always possible to fly. Therefore, we need to look at availing ourselves of opportunities to work on an all-island basis and to see what is possible on that front.

2.15 pm

Smoking

4. **Dr McDonnell** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether it remains departmental policy to promote better health through the cessation of smoking. (AQO 3138/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can confirm that supporting smokers to quit remains a strategic priority for my Department. One of the objectives of the 10-year tobacco control strategy, which I launched in February 2012, is to have more smokers quitting. Through the Public Health Agency, my Department continues to invest considerable funding in the development of specialist smoking cessation services, which, in 2011-12, helped almost 40,000 smokers to set a quit date. There are now over 600 smoking cessation services available throughout Northern Ireland.

Dr McDonnell: I thank the Minister for his answer and for his commitment on the issue. When does he intend to

introduce generic packaging of cigarettes so that there is no glamorisation of smoking going forward?

Mr Poots: That is something that I am giving due consideration to, but I am not wholly convinced on the issue at this point. I know that the public consultation is taking place right across the UK, but I remain to be convinced. We have introduced in the large supermarkets — it will be coming into the smaller shops in 2015 — the new means of keeping cigarettes, in that they are not on display and the fancy displays are removed from public view. Therefore, people will not be able to go into a shop or supermarket and see cigarettes displayed. My main concern at this moment in time is the possibility for people to sell illicit cigarettes on the black market. That is where our main focus and our main problem actually exists. I encourage the Member, in his other capacity in another House, to ensure that Revenue and Customs is given the teeth, the tools and the finance to go after people who are dealing in the black market and very often supplying money to paramilitaries from there.

Mr Cree: Will the Minister advise what action he is taking to reduce smoking in disadvantaged areas? As he knows, disadvantaged communities suffer a wide range of adverse health effects.

Mr Poots: We recognise that disadvantaged areas very often lose out on a whole range of public health models. Therefore, additional attention will be paid to those in disadvantaged areas, particularly to younger people and younger mothers. It is a sad fact that, even today, 8% to 9% of our 11- to 16-year-olds have taken up smoking. Those young people are three times more likely to die as a result than people who take up smoking later in life, and they are less likely to quit smoking. Therefore, we must get the messages to our young people through our community organisations, our sporting organisations and our schools to ensure that people do not take up smoking in the first instance.

Mr G Robinson: Can the Minister detail the investment his Department is making in smoking cessation?

Mr Poots: Through the Department, the PHA invests funding each year to the tune of around £2.7 million on stop smoking services. A further £5 million was invested in the provision of nicotine replacement therapy products, with £1.9 million spent on NRT through our community pharmacies, which do such a good job on smoking cessation services, and £3.1 million was spent through prescriptions issued in GP surgeries and hospitals. It is an issue that we take very seriously.

Carrickfergus and Whitehead Fire Stations

5. **Mr Hilditch** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on staffing levels at Carrickfergus and Whitehead fire stations. (AQO 3139/11-15)

Mr Poots: Carrickfergus station is a variable crewed station. Its approved staffing level is 12 whole-time firefighters and 20 retained firefighters. At present, its actual strength is 10 whole-time firefighters and 15 retained firefighters. Whitehead is a retained fire station and has an approved staffing level of 12 retained firefighters. At present, its actual strength is seven retained firefighters.

Mr Hilditch: I thank the Minister for his answer. What actions are being taken to address the important issue of the number of firefighters at the stations?

Mr Poots: I am well aware that there has been a problem, for which I apologise. The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service recently completed the initial training of a second batch of whole-time recruits. Hopefully, that will help address things. In the area to which you refer, from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm, Whitehead, for example, has three retained personnel and two day-duty personnel, sourced from across the northern area command and redeployed to Whitehead for the day. Unfortunately, from October to December 2012, Whitehead station received 30 calls and failed to respond on six occasions, when those standby arrangements had been provided, because either the calls had been received outside core hour vulnerability periods or a need had not been identified because staff were understood to have been available. Backup arrangements are in place in Carrickfergus and Whitehead to bolster the current rate of response. The NIFRS has not introduced interim standby measures in Carrickfergus, where, of the five failures to respond between 1 October and 31 December, four were related to sending out a second appliance. So I can assure you that, on each of the 11 occasions on which there was an initial failure to respond, the Fire and Rescue Service ensured the mobilisation of the necessary predetermined attendance, either through a backup arrangement or the mobilisation of an appliance from a neighbouring station area in line with current policy.

Mr Beggs: The inability of a retained fire service crew to come out because of lack of numbers puts locals at risk. Will the Minister advise us of what is happening to ensure that, when vacancies are created, they are filled in a more timely way, not just in Whitehead but in other parts of Northern Ireland, so that that risk will be eliminated in the future?

Mr Poots: We have been doing a course of work. Obviously, the northern command has been looking at the situation in Carrick and Whitehead to ensure that we can fully deal with situations as and when they arise. I understand that nobody's life was put in jeopardy as a result of the issues. Nonetheless, we could have provided a better service, and we want to ensure that that happens in the future.

Ms Maeve McLaughlin: Go raibh maith agat. Will the Minister give assurances that he has no concerns around staffing levels in any fire station?

Mr Poots: It is for the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to identify needs and make the case for those needs. Recently, whole-time recruitment took place, and I am pleased that that has happened. We will look at the retained firefighters group to identify and prioritise current vacancies. It is anticipated that vacant retained firefighter posts will be filled by July 2013.

Banbridge Health and Care Centre

7. **Mr Wells** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the proposed health and social care centre in Banbridge. (AQO 3141/11-15)

Mr Poots: The current estimate for completion of the Banbridge project is December 2014. Enabling works have been completed on the site, and work is now under way

to appoint contractors for the main construction work. The main contractors should be in place by September/October 2013, with the construction period to be determined in those negotiations. The business case for Banbridge HCC was approved in mid-2011, and capital funding for the full project of up to £15 million was approved in January 2012.

Mr Wells: I thank the Minister for his answer. As he is aware, the Compton review, 'Transforming Your Care', indicates that Northern Ireland should have a network of similar provision. Indeed, a new centre opened recently in Portadown. Will he tell Members how he expects that ambitious programme to be funded?

Mr Poots: Clearly, we do not have all the capital funding to deliver on those projects. Although Banbridge and Ballymena, for example, will be done through the traditional route, we are looking at alternative means. We are giving consideration to third-party development, which would involve a centre being built by a third party and our leasing the facility back from that third party. We would hope to exact savings by having a much better primary care centre, thus ensuring that fewer people have to make hospital attendances. Lisburn and Newry are two of the locations that are being looked at on a trial basis for third-party development. I should say that, although things are progressing quite well in Lisburn, GPs in Newry seem to think that they can hold us to ransom to some extent. That will not be the case. If Newry does not want it, Newry will not get it. Plenty of other towns and cities across Northern Ireland want it. That is my message to people: we want to provide the best facilities in the country, and no group will actually stop us providing them. We will move elsewhere to another area, but we will not be held to ransom.

Fire and Rescue Service

9. **Mr Byrne** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the grievance procedures identified in the recent audit report on the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service have now been introduced. (AQO 3143/11-15)

14. **Ms McGahan** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the findings of the recent investigations into the Fire and Rescue Service. (AQO 3148/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has confirmed that the grievance matters identified in the audit report are being actively progressed. Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service has accepted all recommendations from the investigation reports published in October 2012. A process has been agreed for monitoring their implementation by both the NIFRS board and the Department. I trust that that covers questions 9 and 14, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Questions 9 and 14 were grouped.

Mr Byrne: I thank the Minister for his answer. Can he give any indication of a timescale for the implementation of recommendations, if and when that happens?

Mr Poots: That course of work is being carried out. Clearly, we are aware of a series of grievances that have taken place in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. Fresh grievances have been submitted recently. We really need to get to the point where we leave a lot of the past in the past and move to a better future in the

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. Unfortunately, that does not seem to be the case, as some people will not allow it to be. They keep raising problems and issues. We have brought in a new acting chief executive, and he is doing good work. I trust that he will receive the necessary support to drive through the changes that the NIFRS needs to turn it into a much better organisation than it has been in the previous number of years.

Ms McGahan: Go raibh maith agat. Is the Minister aware of the number of internal and external investigations have taken place in the organisation since January 2010? Can he provide a list of the inquiries or investigations? It is important that we get this right.

Mr Poots: The Department first became aware that a number of grievances had been lodged with the NIFRS in summer 2010. In May 2012, some 10 grievances were lodged between the three individuals in NIFRS corporate headquarters. The Health Committee was originally advised that those grievances would be resolved by December 2012, as had been Jim Wallace's original intention.

Mr McCarthy: I thank the Minister for his response so far. Will he agree with me that, despite the shenanigans at Fire Service headquarters, overall, the men and women at the front line have done a tremendous job on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland and continue to do so?

Mr Poots: I agree wholeheartedly with Mr McCarthy on that issue.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

10. **Mr McGlone** asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the arrangements that have been put in place following the removal of the chairman of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. (AQO 3144/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following the termination of the appointment of the previous chair, the non-executive directors of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust have elected Mr Robert McCann to act as interim chair until a substantive appointment is made. The Department will soon commence the public appointments process for the appointment of a substantive chair. It is expected that advertising for the post will take place in early February and that I will be in a position to appoint the new chair in the spring.

Mr McGlone: First of all, I thank the Minister for his response. Can I ask the Minister —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Sorry, time is up. I apologise. You almost beat me to it. We must move on.

Justice

Criminal Justice: Delays

1. **Mr McCallister** asked the Minister of Justice to outline how the various criminal justice agencies are working to address avoidable delay within the system. (AQO 3149/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): My Department is working with the agencies in the criminal justice system to speed up justice. We have agreed an ambitious programme of procedural and legislative reform to deliver real and lasting change.

That includes new initiatives such as streamlined files; gatekeepers to ensure file quality; case-ready charging; the introduction of local performance improvement partnerships; and better use of live links for forensic evidence.

2.30 pm

We are also piloting youth engagement clinics, an innovative approach that seeks to divert young offenders from court and future offending. Furthermore, we are continuing to develop proposals for the introduction of statutory time limits for youth cases, and I intend to consult on draft regulations later this year.

In addition, in the proposed faster, fairer justice Bill, my Department plans to bring forward a comprehensive package of legislative reforms, including measures to encourage earlier guilty pleas; reform of the committal process; reform of the summons process; and the introduction of prosecutorial fines. We are consulting on the most effective model for the introduction of statutory case management, and it is my intention that provisions on that also be included in the Bill.

This is a challenge of considerable complexity, but there is a determination right across the system to deliver a faster, fairer justice system for everyone in Northern Ireland.

Mr McCallister: I am grateful to the Minister for his reply. Will he accept and implement the statutory time limits recommended by the youth justice review team? The proposed start times differ, so when does the Minister feel that the clock should start? Does he agree with the review team or with his Department's guidance?

Mr Ford: I am grateful to Mr McCallister for his question. I am sure that the Member, however cheeky he may wish to be, does not expect me to do anything other than agree with my officials when I stand up in the Chamber.

There is a difficult and fundamental issue to address in ensuring that all court cases proceed much more speedily than has been the case in Northern Ireland. Work is progressing well to address the issues with the youth court; in particular, we have looked at drawing on lessons from Hull in Yorkshire for some of the measures. The key issue will be to get that tightened up as fast as possible. Since the time limits are statutory, the precise detail of how they are applied will, of course, be for the House to consider at an appropriate time.

Mr A Maginness: I thank the Minister for his answer. He has committed himself to speeding up trials and avoiding delay. He will be aware that there is an increasing workload on the County Court bench, on not just the criminal side but the civil side. Does the Minister seriously believe that, without a suitable increase in the number of judges on the County Court bench, he will be able to avoid delay?

Mr Ford: I am grateful to Mr Maginness for highlighting the County Court issue. There is clearly an issue around the precise judicial complement that is appropriate. Members will recall that, for the Justice Act 2011, we discussed general, related issues as to how we ensure that we move things forward.

We have also moved forward on the issue of the financial jurisdiction of the County Court. I regret that the County Court Rules Committee took longer than I had hoped to agree on how those rules will apply, with the result that we have not had the opportunity to move cases in a way that assists the County Court. The issue of the judicial complement remains under active consideration.

Mr McCartney: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. I thank the Minister for his answers. When does he intend to bring forward the faster, fairer justice Bill? When would he like to see the changes that are necessary to bring us to a place where justice is faster and fairer?

Mr Ford: I thank the Deputy Chair of the Committee for that point. I certainly hope that we will see the Bill introduced this springtime. There will clearly be extensive work to be done on what looks like being as big a Bill as the Justice Bill that he and his colleagues first considered.

However, there is a lot to be done to ensure that justice is faster and fairer. I trust that the Committee will continue to give a favourable hearing to the views put to it by the Department.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Before calling the next Member, I point out that question 4 has been withdrawn and requires a written answer.

DOJ: Pat Finucane Review

2. **Mr Sheehan** asked the Minister of Justice whether the de Silva report into the murder of Pat Finucane has any implications for his Department. (AQO 3150/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Minister of Justice, I have no direct responsibility for the outworking of the de Silva report. However, I fully recognise that the report raises serious concerns into the policing practices of the past. I am determined to ensure that the public can have full confidence in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland today. Therefore, following the publication of the report, I sought and received a briefing from senior police officers on the safeguards and procedures for agent handling, and the assurance that accountability mechanisms are in place to ward against similar issues arising again. I understand that the police are also due to brief the Policing Board on the report shortly. The Police Ombudsman is reviewing the detail of the report. If there are investigative opportunities to be gleaned, I am assured that he will undertake a full independent and impartial investigation.

Mr Sheehan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire. I thank the Minister for his answer. I wonder whether he agrees with me that the British Government are in breach of the Weston Park agreement by refusing to hold a public inquiry.

Mr Ford: Mr Sheehan may attempt to tempt me in that area. As I said in my substantive response, I, as Minister, have no direct responsibility for those issues. It is not for me, as Minister, to comment on his political view of the Prime Minister or, indeed, on the Prime Minister's political view of the Member's party.

Mr Campbell: I accept the Minister's lack of responsibility for those direct issues. However, although a small number of cases have had investigations into them, there has

been no investigation into thousands of other murders in Northern Ireland. Does he understand and accept the implications for not just his Department but policing on the ground when that position pertains today?

Mr Ford: I fear that Mr Campbell is trying to be equally subtle in the opposite direction. I accept that policing in the atmosphere of today is clouded by issues that have happened in the past. The fact that this society, including the Assembly and the Executive, has failed to deal in a comprehensive way with the issues of the past leaves us in significant limbo in that respect. However, as far as I am concerned, my responsibility is to ensure that the system works properly today, that the police maintain the high standards that they have and that high accountability mechanisms remain in place to ensure that the community can have total confidence in what is being done in our name today.

Mr McDevitt: I declare an interest: I am a member of the Policing Board. It is undoubtedly the case that public confidence in policing and criminal justice today is shaken when reports such as the de Silva report are published, proving, as they do, systemic failure and corruption in a considerable branch of the policing and security infrastructure. In light of all that, does the Minister accept that the substance of the de Silva report requires further enquiry to support and uphold public confidence? Will he, if not as Minister, as leader of the Alliance Party, support the calls for a public inquiry into Pat Finucane's killing?

Mr Ford: I am sorry: I have now been faced with three requests, each of which have amounted to the same thing in different directions. The leader of the Alliance Party and Alliance Party members may or may not comment on different aspects of the past, but the Minister of Justice, who is accountable to the Assembly, has no role in discussing the issues of what government policy is or is not in respect of the past, for which the Northern Ireland Office, and not the Department of Justice (DOJ) post-2010, bears responsibility.

Mr Hussey: I thank the Minister for his responses so far. Does he accept that, as well as the Finucane family seeking further enquiry and investigation, many other families, including the Omagh bomb victims' families, are seeking further answers? How does he propose to deal with them?

Mr Ford: I am tempted to say, as the Prime Minister would say somewhere else, that I refer the Member to the answers that I gave a few minutes previously. I cannot answer the questions that are being raised in the House about atrocities of the past, criminal activity of the past and the role of agencies of the state that have no bearing on the work of DOJ today. I certainly have sympathy with those who are victims of those crimes, whether they be the people of Omagh or the Finucane family. However, I cannot pretend that the Minister of Justice, who reports to the House, has any responsibility for, or say in, what happens.

Police Ombudsman: Loughinisland Investigation

3. **Mr Ó hOisín** asked the Minister of Justice how the recent decision by Court Service to order a new Police Ombudsman's report into collusion and the Loughinisland murders will impact on his Department. (AQO 3151/11-15)

Mr Ford: Following the decision of the High Court in Belfast on 20 December last to set aside the previous Police Ombudsman's public report on aspects of the terrorist attack on Loughinisland in 1994, the current ombudsman, Dr Maguire, has advised that he intends to carry out further investigative work, with a view to publishing a new public statement. Until the investigation is completed, my Department is not in a position to assess the implications.

Mr Ó hOisín: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as an fhreagra sin. Does the Minister agree that the flawed report by the previous ombudsman has undermined public confidence in the office?

Mr Ford: I have to agree with Mr Ó hOisín. Clearly, there was an undermining of public confidence in the operation of the ombudsman's office in a number of respects in the recent past. What I am determined to do is to see that, under the guidance of the new ombudsman, Dr Maguire, with the new staff group that he is putting in place and the inspection of the ombudsman's work by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI), there is full confidence in the work that is done. I am glad to say, from the contacts that I have had with different people in the community, that I believe that confidence is being restored in the office. I look forward to seeing the ongoing work being done by Dr Maguire and the further inspection reports by CJINI to validate that work. That will ensure that full confidence can be provided.

Mrs McKeivitt: Does the Minister recognise the interest and concern in the constituency that I represent, South Down, about the issue of Loughinisland?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mrs McKeivitt. There is significant concern about a number of aspects of the historical work of the ombudsman's office, not least among the people of the Loughinisland area on that particular inquiry.

What we are now seeing is good work being done. Good preparatory work has been done, which is coming close to the point where it will be able to progress to a full and proper investigation into a number of historical issues. When three of those are ready for publication, there will be an inspection of the process and a validation by Criminal Justice Inspection. I believe that that will be the opportunity for the people of Loughinisland and South Down to see the benefits of the new arrangements.

Mr Humphrey: In response to the previous question, the Minister clearly indicated what he and his Department are not able to do and where power resides with the national Government at Westminster. In relation to reports or public inquiries, does Her Majesty's Government, through the relevant Departments at Westminster, ask him and his Department for a view, and does he give one?

Mr Ford: Mr Humphrey needs to define slightly more closely exactly what he means by "public inquiries". If he is talking about the sort of issues that were highlighted in the previous question where the previous Westminster Government announced inquiries into a number of specific atrocities, the answer is that those did not come to my Department. It may be that there are other aspects that he would consider as being covered by his description of inquiries where we are consulted because policies have to

be formulated across the UK. If he wishes to write to me to give me the details, I will happily respond.

Mr Deputy Speaker: As I pointed out, question 4 was withdrawn. Mr Daithí McKay is not in his place, and Mr Mike Nesbitt has just arrived.

PSNI: Number of Officers

6. **Mr Nesbitt** asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the adequacy of the number of police officers in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. (AQO 3154/11-15)

Mr Ford: Any assessment of the adequacy of the number of police officers in the PSNI is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. I have, however, been in frequent contact with the Chief Constable over the past weeks, including yesterday, and have received his assurance that, at present, he has adequate resources to deal with the situation. I can also inform the House that the Chief Constable has commissioned an internal assessment of PSNI resilience and capability to meet the demands of the coming years.

2013 will be a challenging year for the PSNI, with the G8 summit, the World Police and Fire Games and the City of Culture. Taking into consideration that these events will take place during the parading season, it will undoubtedly place significant pressure on the police's financial and physical resources. I am fully committed to doing whatever I can to ensure that the Chief Constable has the required resources.

Mr Nesbitt: I thank the Minister. I note that he says the PSNI has told him that it has adequate resources at present. Will he tell us what contingency is in place with regard to resources and give us his assessment of the impact of current policing demands on the PSNI budget?

2.45 pm

Mr Ford: I am advised by the Chief Constable that if the current situation on the streets persists, alongside the issues that have to be faced because of a severe threat from terrorism, there may well be pressures on the police budget in the current financial year. That is being worked on by the police, and I have no doubt that departmental officials will have to play a part. It may well be that there will be a role for us relating to the Department of Finance and Personnel. The wider issues of non-financial resources are for the Chief Constable to address. There are clearly issues such as mutual aid from other police services in connection with events such as the G8.

Mr Lynch: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. We have learned that it has cost £7 million to date for the ongoing street protests. I listened with interest to the Member who asked the question, and he is one of the people who initially encouraged people onto the streets. Does the Minister agree that that cost will have a negative impact on policing resources?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Mr Lynch that significant costs are being incurred by the police at the moment. The £7 million that has appeared in the media was, I believe, extrapolated from the detailed figures that were published and that police had for costs for a fortnight in December. Those costs were in the region of £3.8 million. Clearly, some people have worked from that, but I understand

that we will not see the full detailed figures for the cost into January for another two or three days. There is no doubt that severe pressures are being placed on the Police Service in dealing on one hand with the threat, for example, to the life of a police officer and his family not far from here shortly before Christmas; and, on the other hand, continuing serious street disturbances. I believe that each of us has an obligation to do all that we can to get people off the streets to reduce that pressure on the police.

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker.

Mr Deputy Speaker: We do not take points of order until the end of Question Time. I will take it then.

Mr Dickson: Minister, do you agree that one of the unnecessary costs on policing, if we could resolve matters further in this place, is that of policing our divided community, and that there is a responsibility on Members to do all that they can in their actions to assist in providing a community that is less divided, therefore reducing the cost of policing?

Mr Ford: It is certainly the case that there are significant costs for the Police Service because we are a divided society. As I just said, I believe there are significant obligations on each of us to do what we can to avoid that and to reduce tensions. It is difficult to estimate exactly what those costs are, but there is no doubt that, by comparison with what would be the case for a similar police service in any part of Great Britain or, indeed, areas for the Garda Síochána with a similar population, the costs of policing in Northern Ireland are significantly higher. That cost falls to us at the expense of other public services.

Police Officers: Security

7. **Mr Gardiner** asked the Minister of Justice to outline what action he has taken to improve the security of off-duty police officers following the recent attempted murder of an officer in Belfast. (AQO 3155/11-15)

Mr Ford: The threat from dissident republicans remains severe and it is clear that police officers are being targeted. There are a small number of people determined to take Northern Ireland back to the past. They pose a significant threat, and we have seen their recklessness and willingness to endanger life, whether it is that of serving police officers, prison officers, their families or the wider community. Following recent attacks, the Police Service has taken a range of steps to enhance the personal security of police officers and staff on and off duty. The security of police officers and, indeed, of prison officers is taken very seriously. There are a number of measures open to police and prison officers to assist them in respect of their personal security. It would not, however, be appropriate to discuss specific arrangements.

Mr Gardiner: Will the Minister offer any reassurance of assistance to former police officers and others who have been the subject of threats in the recent past but are not receiving any support at present?

Mr Ford: I thank Mr Gardiner for the question, but it is not for me to assess the appropriate level of protection to be provided to former police officers. They are entitled, as is any citizen under threat, to seek the assistance of a number of measures, such as the home protection scheme that is operated by the Northern Ireland Office. If Mr

Gardiner has particular concerns about any individual, he should make referral there.

Mr Durkan: Does the Minister accept that there is now a threat to PSNI officers not just from dissident republicans but from loyalist paramilitaries?

Mr Ford: Mr Durkan is absolutely correct. There is a significant threat to police officers, which has, sadly, been witnessed on the streets of — predominantly, but not exclusively — east Belfast for six weeks. There was also the very direct attack on the life of a female police officer sitting in a police car outside the constituency office of my colleagues Naomi Long, Judith Cochrane and Chris Lyttle. That is an indication of the threat that officers are facing from dissident republicans and loyalist paramilitaries, and that is a threat that should be stopped by all sections of the community.

Prison Service: Overtime

8. **Ms Boyle** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the measures in place to ensure that there will be a reduction in overtime within the Prison Service. (AQO 3156/11-15)

Mr Ford: Members will be aware of the overall change programme resulting from the prison oversight team's final report in August 2011 and the strategic efficiency and effectiveness programme launched by the Prison Service. The change programme is bringing about fundamental changes to the Prison Service, how it is managed and operated and the delivery of services focused on engagement with prisoners and contributing to a reduction in the rate of re-offending. As part of a range of measures, in May 2012, the Prison Service reached agreement with the Prison Officers' Association on a new staff deployment agreement. That provided agreement on new grades of staff, staffing levels and ratios, the transfer of existing support grades to the new custody officer role and the new target operating model.

The target operating model was introduced in October 2012 and led to an overall reduction of approximately 200 staff against the previous staff in post. From May 2011, the Prison Service introduced central detail offices at all three establishments, which now manage the deployment of staff within each establishment more efficiently and effectively. Other work is going forward looking at reducing levels of sickness within the service.

I believe that the range of measures to date has been effective, and as the voluntary early retirement scheme and recruitment of new grades are finalised during 2013, the overtime bill will fall accordingly. Finally, it should be noted that, although overtime costs are still incurred by the Prison Service, the overall pay bill for 2012-13 will reduce by a minimum of £7.4 million — savings that will rise in the coming year as the voluntary early retirement scheme proceeds.

Ms Boyle: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I thank the Minister for his response. Does he agree that unless the reform package moves forward quickly and efficiently, the ability to curtail overtime will be severely undermined?

Mr Ford: I certainly agree with Ms Boyle on that point. That is why I have been able to highlight the fact that although there is a significant amount of overtime, the overall pay bill has decreased significantly this year. That

process will continue as the reform programme goes through, because we are all aware of the cost of operating the Prison Service compared with other prison services in these islands and of the necessity to ensure that we get the best possible efficiency in the operation of our prisons to bring down their costs at the same time as we do the vital work of improving the operating of prisons to better reform prisoners.

Mr McGlone: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Aire as a chuid freagraí. Thanks to the Minister for his responses. Some of the responses that he has given have answered what I was going to ask — that is, what progress has been made by the Prison Service in reducing the excess overtime? The Minister mentioned a reduction in the overall cost of wages and the like for the Prison Service. He may well not have them with him at present, but is there any chance that I could have access to those figures, please?

Mr Ford: I think that the Member must have been looking over my shoulder and seen that I do not have the detailed figures sitting in front of me, but I can assure Mr McGlone that I will happily write to him and give him the detailed figures that we have at the present time.

Mr McCarthy: The Minister referred to savings last year of around £7.4 million. I am sure that all Members in the House will applaud the Minister and his staff for their work on achieving that fantastic amount of savings. Can we expect further reductions in the pay bill as the Minister's reform progresses?

Mr Ford: I thank the Member for his reinforcement of that point. Unfortunately, even though I flicked further through the folder, I cannot find the detailed figures. Even though we are looking at an overtime bill so far this year in the region of £2.9 million, as I said, we are anticipating a total reduction in the pay bill of £7.4 million this year as well as further reductions. I assure Mr McCarthy that he will get the same letter containing the details as is now going to Mr McGlone.

Rural Crime

9. **Mrs Dobson** asked the Minister of Justice to outline the work he is doing with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to combat rural crime. (AQO 3157/11-15)

Mr Ford: Reducing opportunities to commit crime and make our rural communities safer is a key strand of the community safety strategy. My Department has been working with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and other statutory and non-statutory partners at a number of levels. We have established a regional steering group for community safety, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the community safety strategy, including the development and implementation by a range of delivery groups of action plans to take forward each strand of the strategy.

DARD officials are represented on this regional steering group, which, at its December meeting, signed off all the action plans. Those action plans, which include details of actions to reduce rural crime, have been forwarded to the Committee for Justice for its consideration.

The benefits of what partnership working can deliver on the ground was evidenced on 5 December when the

Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Michelle O'Neill, and I jointly launched the new Crimestoppers campaign aimed at tackling rural crime and the fear of crime. The campaign encourages rural communities to be vigilant, provides advice on crime prevention measures and encourages the reporting of criminal activity. This campaign was the result of partnership working not only between my Department and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development but with partners from the Ulster Farmers' Union, NFU Mutual, the Police Service, Crimestoppers, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and Northern Ireland Water.

The campaign will complement initiatives that I have previously outlined and which are being delivered at a local level by policing and community safety partnerships (PCSPs) to prevent and reduce rural crime.

My Department is also represented on the interdepartmental group on the rural White Paper action plan and provides updates on progress on delivery of our commitments to ensure that the needs of rural communities are reflected in the community safety strategy and in policing and community safety partnerships' action plans.

Mrs Dobson: I thank the Minister for his detailed response. Does the PSNI have a timescale for reporting back to the victims of rural crime and, if so, will the Minister outline that timescale and how it is monitored?

Mr Ford: The Police Service aims to ensure that it reports back within an appropriate timescale to all victims of crime. I am not able to give Mrs Dobson the precise details that she has asked for today. I fear that another letter will have to be written.

Mr I McCrea: The Minister mentioned some of the work that has been carried out on rural crime. He will be aware that Northern Ireland differs from area to area and that not every piece of work will be relevant to each area. Will he assure the House and, indeed, people who live in rural communities that everything is being done to combat rural crime? Will he join me in encouraging people to ensure that their equipment and their farms are as secure as possible?

Mr Ford: I endorse Mr McCrea's comments. A lot of very positive action is being taken by the police and PCSPs in different parts of Northern Ireland, especially on things such as marking farm tractors, trailers and other machinery, and on a variety of issues around the Farmwatch theme. A significant amount of work is being done.

One of the key benefits from PCSPs is their ability to target what is appropriate for their local community and meet the needs that are put to them. If individuals have specific suggestions about improving crime prevention in their areas, PCSPs are proving that they are up to the task of carrying that forward.

Inspire Women's Project

10. **Mrs McKevitt** asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the Inspire project for female offenders. (AQO 3158/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Inspire project aims to reduce offending among women through community-based interventions

that address the complex needs and issues that contribute to their offending behaviour. The project has achieved widespread recognition for its work — for example, at the Justice in the Community Awards in 2011 and a Butler Trust commendation in 2012. The House of Commons Justice Committee visited the Inspire project in December 2012 to inform its inquiry into women offenders.

I fully endorse the prisons review recommendation that the Inspire project model should be the norm for dealing with women offenders, and my Department mainstreamed the funding for the Inspire project in the greater Belfast area from April 2012.

The Department is now working with the Probation Board, the Prison Service and our voluntary and community partners to roll out the Inspire model across Northern Ireland. Work is already under way to establish an Inspire-based approach in the north-west and the mid-Ulster areas. The Probation Board is also continuing to refine the Inspire project in Belfast

3.00 pm

Assembly Business

Mr Nesbitt: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Perhaps you would review Hansard and look at an untruthful statement that Mr Lynch made during Question Time. He alleged that I was one of those who encouraged people out on to the streets to protest over the Union flag. That is untruthful, inaccurate and potentially inflammatory. It is also deeply ironic, as I was the first to speak in the House today and call for all debates to be both respectful and honest.

Mr Deputy Speaker: I simply endorse what the Speaker said this morning. I encourage all Members to refrain from making comments about events outside the House at the present time. I am sure that I can rely on Members to do that.

Mr McCartney: Further to that point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker, perhaps when you are reviewing Hansard the Member might reflect on the role that 40,000 leaflets played in encouraging people to protest in Belfast.

Mr Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order, but I am sure that the Member is satisfied that he has got it on record.

Private Members' Business

Housing: Private Rented Sector Licensing Scheme

Debate resumed on motion:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to consider the introduction of a licensing scheme for landlords operating in the private rented sector. — [Mr Campbell.]

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. Mr Durkan is not in his place, so I call Mrs Judith Cochrane.

Mrs Cochrane: I am surprised to be called so quickly.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in support of the motion. Our private rented sector has a very important role to play in addressing housing need in Northern Ireland. There are increasing waiting lists in the social housing sector. With fewer and fewer people being able to get on to the property ladder, renting is fast becoming the only option for many in Northern Ireland.

As a result of the property boom and the recession that followed, a new kind of landlord has emerged in the past number of years. Those who bought property as an investment now find themselves in a situation where they have become landlords to get income from the investment. In a way, they have become sort of amateur landlords. Due to inheritance, others have become landlords by default. Although we accept that the vast majority of our landlords run a professional operation, too many tenants in the private sector have had to tolerate poor housing conditions and poor practices by their landlords and letting agents. Therefore, it is imperative that we ensure that those who rent their home from a private landlord are afforded some protection and support.

Just a few months ago, we approved the draft Landlord Registration Scheme Regulations, which give effect to the landlord registration scheme, including the functions and responsibilities of the scheme registrar and the information that a landlord must provide to the registrar to register and continue to be registered. At that time, the Committee for Social Development as a whole raised concerns that the scheme was maybe a light touch and did not go far enough in some areas. A licensing scheme could perhaps provide some further protection to that afforded currently and, therefore, should be welcomed.

A number of issues were mentioned earlier. If the Minister is to take such a scheme forward, I urge him to include licensing standards, such as the requirement that landlords attempt to manage tenants' antisocial behaviour and that they have an adequate tenancy agreement in place. Problems with tenancy agreements have arisen on a number of occasions in my constituency of East Belfast. It raises the question of whether we also need better legislation for letting agents, and I am currently looking at that with Assembly officials.

Many landlords use letting agents to organise the leasing of their property. As part of the fee that the letting agency charges, landlords are provided with a tenancy agreement. Naturally, you would expect that tenancy agreement to be up to date with current legislation, including, for instance, detailing who is responsible for paying the rates as per the rates order. Unfortunately, however, the letting of property

falls outside the Estate Agents Act 1979, and I have seen instances where the tenancy agreement that well-known estate agents provided is actually not worth the paper that it is written on.

In summing up, it is important to note that good landlords would have nothing to fear from a licensing scheme, as they are likely already to be complying with good practice. I support the motion and agree that we should look into establishing a licensing scheme for private landlords here. That, along with the tenancy deposit scheme and the landlord registration scheme, would reinforce the sector as a valid choice and ensure that tenants and landlords are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Mr F McCann: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle, agus a chairde. I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion and commend the Members who brought it to the Chamber.

The issue of regulating the private rented sector has been debated many times in the Chamber. In fact, in mandates past, I tabled two motions asking for legislation on registration of the sector and more robust regulations to bring order to a sector that was unregulated. One of those motions received the support of the House, but the second was defeated when all parties rejected it.

The sector has tens of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money going into its coffers by way of housing benefit. There are also many in the private rented sector who provide good properties of a high standard and have spent a lifetime providing much-needed accommodation across the social strata. However, it was also recognised that a substantial rump of the sector does not meet the standards expected in housing provision.

We also need to remind ourselves that the sector has doubled in size over the past number of years and now provides more houses to the socially rented sector than the Housing Executive and the housing associations put together. The outworking of the document 'Building Sound Foundations', which was brought to the House by a previous Social Development Minister, was the response to pressure for action to be taken to regulate the sector. The vast majority of people who responded to the consultation said that they wanted action taken to deal with the private rented sector.

We in Sinn Féin argued that any legislation should be robust and able to stand the passage of time in dealing with the unregulated sector. When it was debated in Committee, we spoke of the need to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords who have abused their position as providers of social housing. My colleagues on the Social Development Committee at that time proposed, as part of the proposed legislation, that the private rented sector should meet the standards that are expected of the Housing Executive and housing associations, such as meeting the decent homes standard. We also proposed that the lifetime homes standard should be part of that proposal, to ensure that people with disabilities who look to the private rented sector to deal with their housing needs could have their needs met. The Committee voted against the proposals, saying that they would put undue cost pressures on the private rented sector.

As legislators, we should aspire to ensure that the highest standards of housing fitness are the order of the day. I ask the Members who tabled the motion whether they have

approached their Minister to find out whether he is open to proposals to strengthen legislation that controls the private rented sector. Have they received any commitment from him to move to include licensing as another element of regulating the sector? Can they also lay out for us what the motion will do to protect those who are trapped in the private rented sector? Do they believe that there should be a package of proposals brought together to deal with the sector, which, from listening to the Minister in the past, will be relied on more for the provision of housing in the social rented sector?

I know that licensing is being used in other jurisdictions and could no doubt add to the mandatory registration and protection of tenants' deposits that is now on the cards. It will also ensure that those in the sector who do not have a licence cannot operate as a landlord. Licensing also deals with property standards and sets out a fit-and-proper-person test for those who wish to be part of the sector. In fact, in September last year, the Chair of the Social Development Committee said, when speaking on landlord registration in a debate in the House, that the Bill did not go far enough. He said that, had we added a fit-and-proper-person test and had other issues such as dealing with antisocial behaviour been included in the previous Bill, that would have strengthened people's hands in dealing with the sector. He also said that the issue was not just about dealing with landlords but about educating the sector and ensuring that there is a better understanding between landlords and those who rent from them of what their rights are. This is not about frightening good landlords but dealing with unscrupulous landlords.

In a speech to the Fabian Society last week, the Labour leader, Ed Miliband, called for a register of landlords and for more powers to be given to councils to strike off rogue landlords. He said that most landlords and rental agencies are above board but spoke of there being too many rogue landlords and agencies providing unfit accommodation or ripping off their tenants. He also spoke of new powers for councils to deal with that problem.

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

Mr F McCann: We need to look at additional powers to deal with the private rented sector, but that can only come as a package. The issue should be taken back to the Committee so that it can work with the Minister to ensure that we have measures that stand the test of time and protect tenants who fall prey to unscrupulous landlords.

Mr Durkan: We welcome the intention behind the motion to ensure better regulation of the private sector, to protect tenants and to increase confidence in the sector. The SDLP is committed to regulating the role of the private sector and protecting tenants as much as we can, and we have been supportive throughout the process. In saying that, I am somewhat confused at the timing of the motion and have attempted to table an amendment to ensure that a review of the mandatory registration scheme would take place before additional requirements were placed on landlords. A few months ago, when the Social Development Committee considered the mandatory registration scheme, the housing rights sector made the Committee aware that, in Scotland, there is a tougher regulation scheme that involves landlords having to satisfy a fit-and-proper test to ensure that tenants are protected from unscrupulous landlords who may have treated tenants badly in the past.

Following the advice of the Department at that time, it was deemed best to roll out the mandatory registration scheme in the first instance. It will become effective this year. As a Committee, we accepted the Department's recommendation for a light-touch scheme that would protect tenants and promote a positive impact on business.

Mr Maskey: I thank the Member for giving way. It is worth clarifying that there were members of the Committee who had a clear view that the primary legislation would not permit the type of more robust regulation that many members wanted. The Committee accepted the Department's recommendations on the basis that the primary legislation did not facilitate more robust regulation.

Mr Durkan: That is accepted. I thank the Member for his intervention.

It is my opinion that, now that we have passed the registration scheme without such requirements and the scheme has yet to be implemented, the registration scheme should be reviewed and, if it is unsuccessful or is not providing suitable regulation and enough protection for tenants, the Department should certainly consider or proceed with a licensing scheme for the private sector.

Mandatory registration by landlords is the first step in effective regulation of the private sector, and the register of all private landlords will now allow councils to work and communicate with landlords. That means that councils can ensure that landlords comply with the law, maintain high standards and have the ability to protect tenants by taking enforcement action if and when necessary. Compulsory licensing would mean that landlords cannot let a property unless they hold a licence to operate. Various criteria could be used for obtaining a licence, including property standards and the fit-and-proper test that is applied elsewhere.

A light-touch licensing scheme is a scheme where the criteria only cover part of that contained in a comprehensive scheme. For example, it may only refer to the landlord being a fit and proper person, and, while we accept that licensing would add additional protections for tenants, any scheme would need very wide consultation on the form of the licensing and its requirements. We would also have to look at the pace of a licensing scheme and ensure that it would not be overly burdensome or costly to landlords or to the Department.

Given that the Minister has recently announced his intentions to reform the social housing sector and that there is an increasing view that a lot of Housing Executive assets will move to the private sector and that, due to welfare reform, tenants will experience an increased reliance on the private sector, regulation will become more and more important. We have a duty of care to those tenants and to those citizens to ensure that the accommodation that they end up in meets high standards. We support the idea that this licensing scheme should be considered, although we think that it is a bit premature, given that the landlord registration scheme is not being rolled out yet. We support the motion.

3.15 pm

Ms Brown: As a member of the Social Development Committee, I support the motion tabled by my party colleagues Paula Bradley and Gregory Campbell. I declare an interest as a tenant in the private rented sector.

As we appear to be in a seemingly never-ending recession with still-declining property values, long gone are the days when everyone had a reasonable expectation of owning their home and setting out a life on the property ladder. The absolute failure of the banks to live up to their responsibilities to families, businesses and homeowners has meant that many people now find that renting a property is their only option to put a roof over the heads of their family. While the banks continue to count their bonuses, everyone else is left to count the costs of their abject failure to provide stability and security when people need it most. Given the increased rental market and the role that it now plays in housing for private tenants, including those who are vulnerable and in need, it is up to us to ensure that the interests and rights of tenants and landlords are protected and respected. I am pleased that the Minister has demonstrated his commitment to date through the introduction of the tenancy deposit scheme and the landlord registration scheme, which is in the process of being implemented. Today's motion aims to build on that commitment, and I welcome that.

There are existing legal requirements on landlords to fulfil certain obligations, including providing their contact details if operating through an agent, issuing a rent book and ensuring that they provide appropriate notice should they wish the tenant to vacate the property. Although many landlords fulfil these obligations, some do not. Of course, the same could be said of tenants. Some look after a property as if it were their own, and others leave the property almost unfit for other tenants, so the scheme should not just be seen as singling out landlords for further scrutiny. It should be welcomed by all as a measure of respect by all involved in the rental market. I hope that this system of licensing will protect tenants as well as ensuring that landlords know their obligations.

Although there are many professional landlords and letting agents, there is a growing number of homeowners who let out properties and may not have the experience and backup that is necessary in this new age of increased lettings. It is these landlords who, I believe, will benefit most from regulation and the training that goes with it to ensure that they meet their legal obligations. The majority of people who live in the rented sector are more likely to be on a low income, be vulnerable or be disadvantaged compared with those who own their home. It is our duty to protect these people, and, therefore, I believe that a system of licensing is the next step forward.

I have one further point for consideration, which I hope this new scheme may be able to address, namely the responsibility of landlords to ensure that tenants of their property are not having a detrimental effect on their neighbours. For example, we know of the difficulty caused in some residential areas by multiple-occupancy student properties. While advocating the right of everyone to have access to a home, we have seen for ourselves the misery caused to communities by individuals or families who seem to have no thought whatsoever for their neighbours and communities. Therefore, I hope that the scheme will further incentivise landlords and tenants to live up to their responsibilities.

In conclusion, I look forward to the outcome of the tenancy deposit scheme and the landlord registration scheme currently being implemented, and I fully support the motion.

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

I thank all the Members who have contributed to the debate. If my response fails to address any of their specific points, I will, of course, write to them separately. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the motion, which calls on me to consider the introduction of a licensing scheme for landlords operating in the private rented sector. The motion is very timely. Members are well aware of the growing importance of the private rented sector in meeting housing need and the number of initiatives that I have brought forward in an effort to improve the private rented sector in Northern Ireland.

I was pleased to introduce two sets of regulations in the Assembly last September that allowed my Department to introduce landlord registration and tenancy deposit schemes. Tenancy deposit schemes will be operational from April this year, and we will have a landlord registration scheme by the summer. By way of update on the tenancy deposit schemes, I can tell you that a number of providers have come forward with proposals to operate in Northern Ireland. My officials are finalising the assessment of the proposed schemes and their administrators. I hope to make an announcement shortly on how many schemes will be approved and who will operate them; and my intention is that the scheme administrators will have a number of weeks to publicise the schemes before an official launch in April.

With regard to landlord registration, my officials are working to have a scheme ready by the summer. All landlords operating in Northern Ireland will be required to register immediately when a new tenancy is created and within 12 months if they have existing tenancies. When the landlord registration regulations were proceeding through the Assembly, I made it clear that a register of landlords was very much a first step to making improvements in the sector. The landlord registration scheme will give local councils the information they need to be proactive in ensuring that a private landlord adheres to the law already in place. In addition, the proposals set out in my Department's recent housing strategy consultation confirm that our aim is to build on the private rented sector strategy. Over the next few years, I want to focus on improving the regulatory framework in a targeted way that will make the private rented sector a more attractive housing option for a wider range of households. The consideration of licensing is therefore something that will fit well with this aim.

Let me turn now to the focus of the motion. Private rented sector licensing is how local authorities in England are seeking to improve the regulation of their private rented sector. In essence, English authorities are using powers in the Housing Act 2004 to ensure that rogue landlords are unable to operate. A licence is issued only where a landlord declares any criminal convictions, meets health and safety standards and has adequate systems in place for their tenants to report repairs and defects. Landlords without a licence may be prosecuted and may no longer be able to operate their business. It should be noted that Scotland already has compulsory landlord registration and Wales is working on its own scheme.

Licensing helps to improve private sector housing with respect to the physical condition of the homes and the management standards. In improving the image of the sector, it should, logically, be welcomed by landlords as

well as tenants. From the detail of some of the licensing schemes in England it is clear that some of the conditions that a landlord must adhere to are already a requirement here under the Private Tenancies (Northern Ireland) Order 2006; for example, where a landlord must provide a tenant with a statement of tenancy terms. It is also worth noting that the requirement for landlords to declare convictions was considered during the drafting of landlord registration regulations here; however, our legal advice indicated that we did not have the essential powers.

If we decide that licensing is the next step for the private rented sector, new legislation will be required. Members may be interested to learn that I am already considering the benefits of requiring landlords of houses in multiple occupation to have a licence before they may operate, and that too would require new legislation and the support of the Assembly.

I want to pick up on a few points raised by Members during the debate. I noted the phrase used by Judith Cochrane from east Belfast that the private rented sector should be a "viable option". That has to be our priority. We have had a lot of focus on the social sector with regard to housing associations and the Housing Executive, and it is right and proper that we put a considerable focus there. However, the fact is that the private rented sector is growing. Traditionally, the private rented sector was popular with students and young professionals, but, over the past decade, the profile of private rented sector tenants has greatly changed. We are now seeing more families and more people living on low incomes and people with a wider range of vulnerabilities move to that sector to meet their housing needs.

The 2011 house condition survey reported that there were 145,000 properties in the private rented sector. That means that the private rented sector is now bigger —

Mr F McCann: Will the Minister give way?

Mr McCausland: Yes, I will.

Mr F McCann: I welcome everything that you have said, especially about the possibility of some new regulations or legislation. We argued in the past that that all has to be part of a package to ensure that we do not have to keep coming back to this. You mentioned the Private Tenancies Order. When it came in, it increased the power of councils. However, if you talk to councils across the board, they will point out that there are big loopholes in it and it does not allow them to do their job.

The other thing that needs to be part of that is the condition of houses. We expect social housing providers to meet a certain standard, whether that is the decent homes standard or decent homes plus standard. I know that it may be just a phrase, but you need to do that by looking at the large rump of private landlords who provide inadequate housing for people in the social rented sector and get a good rent from people for that provision.

Mr McCausland: I will return to some of the Member's points in just a moment.

I want to focus back on the point about the scale of the sector. There are 145,000 properties in the private rented sector. According to the same survey, the preliminary findings were 116,000 properties in the social rented sector. We do not know the actual number of landlords, but it is somewhere between 60,000 and 80,000. We will have

better information on that when the landlord registration is introduced later this year. It is a sizeable sector, and we want it to be a viable and attractive sector and an option for people.

Fra McCann raised the point earlier in his contribution about drawing a clear distinction between good landlords — there are good landlords — and those who are unscrupulous, which was the word that he used. Yes, there is the importance of good standards. To pick up on his intervention there, I think it is important that, as we take this forward and look at this, there is close engagement with the Committee, as the Member called for, and I see this very much as a process moving forward and building step by step to get the right outcome for the private rented sector.

I wanted to pick up on one point that Mark Durkan made, because it actually relates to another issue. He said that a lot of Housing Executive stock:

“will move to the private sector”.

Housing associations are not the private sector. Housing association properties are social houses. One of the reasons why I picked up on that was that it may have been a slip of the tongue, careless phraseology or whatever, but it is a problem. In comments on what was said recently about the Housing Executive restructuring, the term “privatisation” has been used. We are not talking about privatisation in terms of reshaping the social housing structure and reshaping and reconfiguring. Therefore, I want to emphasise the point that we need to be careful in our terminology. The Housing Executive stock will not move to the private sector. We are talking about the introduction of housing associations.

Pam Brown made a valuable point about antisocial behaviour. I met Members on the other side of the Chamber about antisocial behaviour in some areas of their constituencies. One of my concerns has been that you can tackle it more readily in some ways in the social sector, but, if you move people out of the social sector, where do they move to? They move to the private sector, and the problem is simply decanted from one street to another and one house to another. A focus now on the private rented sector would be of great benefit all round.

I welcome today's motion, and I thank the Members for tabling it. It goes without saying that I would welcome a strong endorsement for the motion. The introduction of tenancy deposit and landlord registration will go a long way to improve the regulation of the private rented sector.

The implementation of the housing strategy and the evaluation of landlord registration will indicate what further action is required, but I have no hesitation in saying that licensing is something that will certainly be considered as we proceed and move forward. We need to have a good provision and a good framework for housing in all its sectors — not only in social housing, but in the private rented sector. It is important that those who are in that sector, who live in that sector and who benefit from that sector have adequate and appropriate protection, as should those in the social sector.

3.30 pm

Ms P Bradley: As has been said, we are a nation that is in changing times. The time of being able to purchase our

own properties without any great difficulty is most certainly over. That has come about for a number of reasons: people want to be more mobile, to allow them to follow jobs; the banking crisis; and job uncertainty, to name a few. The result has been that there are now more and more people entering the rental market. It is impractical to expect that the social housing sector can provide a rental property for everyone who wants or needs one. Therefore, a growing proportion of people have to rely on the private sector to meet their housing needs.

Those who live in private landlord housing now outnumber those in the social sector, and those involved in the private sector have needed some additional protection. The Minister has introduced a number of initiatives that are aimed at helping protect landlords and tenants in that market. For every good landlord, there is a bad tenant, and for every good tenant, there is a bad landlord. Through the introduction of the tenancy deposit scheme and landlord registration, we aim to promote the good and weed out the bad. Tenants who find themselves in the private rented market should be confident through such schemes that they have a degree of protection should issues arise. A landlord licensing scheme would continue to build upon those previous measures, particularly the landlord registration scheme. Landlord registration will be the primary step, with the licensing scheme able to address any failings that emerge from that scheme.

Through licensing, the tenants can be reassured that landlords will have to undergo criminal checks as part of the process, and landlords will be required to undergo training to alert them to their rights and responsibilities. I believe, therefore, that the introduction of the licensing scheme is a natural progression from the registration scheme.

The benefits of licensing have been seen elsewhere in the UK. Scotland, for example, has licensing in place, and various local authorities in England are in the process of implementing a licensing scheme. Wales has adopted the same approach as Northern Ireland, with the introduction of a landlord registration scheme to follow, if necessary. I believe that it is important that we strive to ensure that tenants in Northern Ireland are not in a more precarious position than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom.

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

I turn my attention to the Members who took part in the debate. First, the proposer, Mr Gregory Campbell, highlighted the difficulties that families are facing, due to the economy, when trying to buy their own home, although he has been a little bit more positive by saying that that is improving. He stated that, during his research on the subject, there were around 150,000 residential properties available for rent, with upwards of 50,000 to 60,000 landlords. He also suggested that the licensing scheme was there to safeguard and protect tenants.

Mrs Judith Cochrane spoke about the fact that fewer and fewer people can get on to the property ladder. She also spoke of amateur landlords, as well as professional, and about how licensing would assist all of those. She also stated that the Social Development Committee felt that registration was not enough. We certainly felt that to be the case. I know Mr Maskey came in on that point when Mr Durkan was up. It was something that we talked about at

great length. Therefore, I feel that the licensing scheme is adding to that. Mrs Cochrane also asked that the licensing scheme include the responsibilities around antisocial behaviour, and she said that good landlords have nothing to fear from any such licensing scheme.

Mr McCann stated that this type of licensing scheme had been debated in the previous mandate and that he had called for more robust regulations at that time. He also said that private landlords should meet standards in the same way as the Housing Executive and housing associations are expected to. He said that it would ensure that those who do not have a licence cannot be part of this sector. He advised that it should be taken back to the Committee for debate and to work it through with the Minister to protect those tenants.

Mr Durkan said that the issue was debated in Committee and that we accepted the Department's recommendations. He welcomes the licensing scheme and the fact that private landlords should comply with the law and meet these high standards, but the scheme would need wide consultation regarding its requirements. He said that we have a duty of care to protect our tenants.

Ms Brown said that renting properties was an option that was available to only very few people, that the licensing scheme was not only there to protect tenants but to protect landlords, and that the motion will support new landlords. She also brought up the issue of antisocial behaviour.

I thank the Minister for his part in the debate and welcome the update on the landlord registration. He advised us again that that was the first step, that he wants to make the private rented sector a more attractive option, and that licensing will help to improve the private rented sector and should be welcomed by landlords and tenants.

I appreciate that the vast majority of landlords strive to achieve high standards in their properties and that a number of landlords also have a very small portfolio of properties. Some even become landlords because of an inability to sell their previous home, and no one wishes to make the red tape so vast that people find it daunting or off-putting. We need a vibrant private rental sector in Northern Ireland, and we need a sector that is seen as the best that it can be. Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Minister is to consider the implementation of a licensing scheme to address any shortcomings in the previous measures already passed by this Chamber and to continue to promote high quality of excellence in the sector.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to consider the introduction of a licensing scheme for landlords operating in the private rented sector.

Motion made:

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

Adjournment

Car Parking: Newry

Mr Deputy Speaker: The proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak, and the Minister will have 10 minutes in which to respond. On this occasion, all other Members who wish to speak will have eight minutes.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Tá mé buíoch as deis cainte a fháil ar an ábhar tábhachtach seo. I am grateful for the opportunity to debate this issue, which is extremely important for the city of Newry at this time. Everyone is aware of the huge pressure that retailers are under because of the economic downturn. In certain areas, including Newry, traders feel that that pressure is compounded by competition from the growing number of out-of-town retail outlets, some of which are in a position to offer large numbers of free parking spaces.

In the Assembly, there is widespread recognition that we should do what we can to ensure that our town and city centres do not become economic wastelands. There are already too many empty shops in our town and city centres, and the empty shops rate relief scheme is one way in which we have attempted to encourage new businesses to occupy those properties.

By their nature, town and city centres are at a disadvantage. For historical reasons, they are more difficult to access than out-of-town retail centres. One major aspect of access that can prove to be a barrier is car parking. Quite simply put: ease of parking encourages customers, whereas parking difficulties deter customers. Therefore, if we want to encourage trade in our town and city centres, we should do all in our power to ensure that parking arrangements are such that they encourage trade rather than the contrary.

The traders in Newry city centre are concerned that recent changes to parking arrangements will be detrimental to trade in several areas of the city.

On 7 January, the Department for Regional Development (DRD) converted from kiosk-operated car parking to pay-and-display in Abbey Way, Canal Bank 1 and Canal Bank 2 car parks. Roads Service says that it is introducing the project with the aim of delivering savings across Northern Ireland. However, Newry traders believe that the change will have a major negative impact on attracting shoppers into the city centre. Shopping precincts such as those at the Cathedral Quarter, Hill Street, the Creamery Quarter and Monaghan Street will be affected. Loss of trade in the city centre could lead to shop closures, which would mean less income for government through rates. One has to ask: at the end of the day, where will the savings really be?

Traders believe that the effect of the new system will be that people will be inclined to spend less time in the city for fear of getting a parking fine. Many people who previously would have spent time shopping and browsing in the city centre will be more conscious of time and curtail their shopping, knowing that the parking clock is ticking in

the background. Traders believe that the result will be a reduction in badly needed trade. If shoppers get parking fines, the chances are that they will avoid the city centre in the future.

Traders already face stiff competition from a necklace of out-of-town retail outlets and, in the near future, will have to face competition from a major retail development that will offer free car parking close to the city centre. As well as having been badly affected by the recession, traders have come through some very challenging experiences while the first part of the new public realm scheme was under construction. They are set for further disruption, as part 2 commences in April 2013. Part 2 of the scheme will remove a considerable number of current parking spaces along the quays, which in turn will increase pressure on the remaining spaces if those places are not replaced. Some 135 parking spaces may be lost. Traders welcome the public realm projects but quite rightly question the fact that important parking spaces are being removed without replacement. Traders are angry at the level of consultation with stakeholders and the wider business community on those changes to parking arrangements.

Even at this stage, perhaps there are some measures that could be adopted to mitigate the effects of the changes. Top-up kiosks in Hill Street and Monaghan Street, for example, would help to ensure that shoppers could prolong their time in the city centre without having to return to their vehicle to renew their ticket.

I very much welcome the fact that the Minister is here today, and I know that he has first-hand experience of the situation in Newry city centre. I ask the Minister to take on board the traders' concerns and do what he can in the immediate short term to improve the situation and address those concerns. For a longer-term, more strategic approach, the Department needs to work with all stakeholders in Newry city centre, and with Newry and Mourne District Council, to take an overview of the parking situation in the city in order to design parking provision that serves customers, promotes trade and encourages visitors to the city centre.

The Newry city master plan, which was published in October 2011, addressed the parking situation. There were suggestions that the construction of purpose-built car parks at key gateways on the edge of the city centre would be helpful. Those would be multistorey car parks, integrated with mixed-use development, and would provide cost-effective and convenient car parking at the main arrival points to the city centre. It was suggested that electronic car-parking signage should be established along key approach routes into the city centre to provide motorists with live information on the number of available car-parking spaces.

3.45 pm

I think that we all acknowledge that where our transport system does not serve all the community in the way in which we would like it to — for example, we do not have a subway in Newry, nor are we likely to have — the dependence on the car will remain heavy in the immediate future and, indeed, into the long term. So, it is important that we ensure that parking arrangements are such that they serve the traditional city centre, encourage trade and allow pedestrians easy access to the shopping precinct.

As I say, I am grateful to the Minister for attending the debate and I look forward to hearing a positive response from him. Go raibh míle maith agat. Thank you very much.

Mr Irwin: Mr Bradley made some extremely important points on the issue. I know that the impact of changing the parking payment procedure from kiosk to pay-and-display and parking enforcement in Newry could be applied to many other larger towns and cities throughout Northern Ireland.

Traders and shoppers are under increasing pressure in the current competitive economic climate, with consumers being ever more cautious in their spending. That has a direct impact on the many business that vie for trade. Over the past number of months, we have heard a great deal about the difficulties that traders face with the accessibility of towns and cities and the positives and negatives that are associated with out-of-town shopping centres. The Assembly has a significant role to play in assisting the growth of towns and cities, and parking ranks as highly important when encouraging such growth.

In recent years, Newry has experienced a boom in trade that has been fuelled by strong cross-border shopping. We all recall news stories about the unique increase in trade and the broad welcome that there was for that. However, there are, of course, winners and losers in this situation. There is no doubt that the draw of shopping centres, with the convenience of a wide variety of shops all under one roof, makes a very appealing proposition for the pound-conscious shopper. I am thinking of the Tesco store that aims to open this year on the Belfast Road and will most certainly offer free parking. We also recognise that local and often long-established stores along the high streets of our towns and cities are equally important. In the face of such huge competition for trade, we can forgive the main street retailer for feeling a little undervalued.

Mr Wells: Does the Member accept that many of those small traders kept Newry alive during difficult periods of the Troubles? Many of their premises were bombed, firebombed and attacked. They stood by Newry while the big multinationals noticeably kept out of the city. Of course, those companies came into Newry when the going started to get good, as it were. We owe a debt of gratitude to those small traders, and we need to stand by them at this difficult time.

Mr Irwin: I thank the Member for his intervention. I agree fully with his concerns.

Shoppers' concerns about overpaying for parking in Newry and the much-perceived overzealousness of parking enforcement officers throughout many of our towns and cities have, to a degree, reinforced the perceived hassle-free element of the shopping centre, where there is an indoor environment and, in some cases, free parking and huge variety.

The Minister for Regional Development will, of course, be able to shed light on his decision to change the kiosk-operated parking payment system to pay and display. He can explain to the House the reasons for that change and the benefits that he believes will stem from it.

I understand the concerns of traders who feel that shoppers could, as a result of the changes, spend less time in the Hill Street and Monaghan Street areas due to the fact that they will have to return to their vehicles

within a specified period to avoid a very costly parking enforcement notice. I support Mr Bradley in his desire to see an acceptable solution to the situation. It certainly is an issue for all the towns and cities in Northern Ireland that report similar concerns.

In the near future, my colleague Jim Wells and I will meet the Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade. There is no doubt that this matter will be on the agenda, and I look forward to discussing it further.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the Adjournment debate. The topic should perhaps have been titled, "Lack of Parking in Newry", because parking there has been problematic for a long time. I welcome the Minister's presence. Although he lives in the leafy suburb of Bessbrook, I know that he is very familiar with the problems in the Newry city area.

Mr Bradley and Mr Irwin dealt with the retail issues and the problems that retailers have. From my experience of talking to retailers, I know that doing away with the kiosk and putting in pay stations has been problematic. I have experienced that myself in the area behind the cathedral, where people park horizontally across a space instead of in it. As some form of enforcement or, at least, supervision of parking, the kiosk provided a solution. I know that this has caused problems for retailers and, in particular, people using the Hill Street area.

Parking for residents in the Newry area has also been extremely problematic. I attended a meeting last Friday that was called at the instigation of Newry and Mourne District Council. Present at that meeting were DRD staff from Roads Service traffic management branch, and so on; the PSNI; local councillors; and community representatives. I know that there has been a huge problem with parking for retail purposes, but there have also been huge parking problems for residents, particularly in Dominic Street, Patrick Street, Francis Street, Mallon Park, Kiln Street and up as far as Glen Hill.

What has essentially happened is that, for the past couple of years, large stores at the Buttercrane Centre and, indeed, the Quays have charged people for parking within the confines of their shopping areas. That has simply succeeded in pushing people to park in residential areas. The houses in Francis Street, Patrick Street and Dominic Street were built mainly for an elderly population and for people who suffer from disabilities, yet those people cannot get parked in the designated parking bays at the back of their houses. I witnessed that again last Thursday evening. My mother lives in Dominic Street, and she has a parking bay at the back of the house that is extremely hard to get in and out of. Even when the bay is free, it is almost impossible to get in and out of it, because people park at all sorts of angles on Thomas Street. Last Thursday, I witnessed cars parked across parking bays when residents' cars were not there, and people were unable to get in and out.

People on Drumalane Road were pushed out by staff from Teleperformance, as well as by Sainsbury's, where parking spaces have been filled particularly with the influx of Southern customers. That has caused huge problems. In conjunction with the PSNI and the local community association, some solutions have been found, including that people parked illegally are now getting ticketed regularly. That seems to have gone some way to solving

that problem. However, all that that has meant is that the cars previously parked illegally in Drumalane Road are now being parked illegally in Dominic Street, Francis Street, Patrick Street, Kiln Street and around that area, and that has caused huge problems.

One of the suggestions made at Friday's meeting was that DRD staff, in conjunction with retailers, particularly those in Buttercrane and the Quays, draw up some sort of questionnaire for residents. It was interesting that Buttercrane sent a representative to the meeting but the Quays did not, even though it is in one of the areas with most problems.

The problem will be compounded from 4 February, when Dominic Street will become one way, owing to the installation of water mains. Mr Bradley mentioned the public realm work. The year before last, I asked DRD to do a survey, and it found that 5,000 vehicles a day, including 40-foot trailers, buses, and so on, use that one small street, which causes huge problems. DRD really needs to look at that. There was some talk of Dominic Street becoming one way permanently, but that requires, I think, the support of the majority of residents. It is an ongoing debate. I think that the Minister is already aware of that, but I wanted to raise the subject.

There are particular problems for retailers, and those have been alluded to by Mr Bradley. Indeed, Mr Wells mentioned the fact that the small retailers in Newry kept the city going over many years, particularly during the conflict. The large stores like Sainsbury's, Debenhams and all the rest of them came in when things seemed to be on a more even keel. Newry was avoided for many years. It is only fair that local retailers should have the benefit, so that, where parking restrictions are put in place, they should not impede people's ability to park and shop in Newry city centre. That is very important. The retailers in the city centre deserve a great degree of support and loyalty from the people of Newry city because, as I said, they kept the city going through very difficult times.

Residents' parking has become a huge issue, and it is an ongoing issue. The town or city was never meant for the volume of traffic that it has. Consider this: Newry is the only place I have ever been in my life where people park on the inside lane of a dual carriageway. I still call that the new road, but it is quite an old road now. They park in one lane and block it because, presumably, they would argue that there is no other available parking. Those issues arise daily.

Mr D Bradley: I thank the Member for giving way. He will probably recall that his colleague, the former Minister for Regional Development, had begun to investigate the possibility of residents' parking schemes. That was a number of years ago. As yet, I am not aware that any satisfactory scheme has come into being. Perhaps the Minister could update us on the Department's current thinking on introducing residents' parking schemes, which would alleviate the situation in places such as Pool Lane, Thomas Street, Dominic Street and Patrick Street in Newry.

Mr Brady: I thank the Member for his intervention. Just on residents' parking, I know that there have been pilot schemes, and those were alluded to at the meeting I was at on Friday with the council. The people from the community groups expressed some reservations about their introduction. Obviously, it requires legislation, which

is quite a long drawn-out process. It was said that that would be one of the issues addressed as part of DRD's questionnaire. Obviously, the residents can be given the opportunity to comment on that.

I absolutely empathise with retailers on the problems and concerns that they have, particularly in Newry city centre. However, it also has to be pointed out that residents on the periphery, particularly of the Quays and Buttercrane, continue to have huge problems.

Mrs McKeivitt: I welcome the opportunity to discuss car parking in Newry. I also welcome some of the small business owners from Newry to the Chamber this afternoon to listen to the debate.

From my experience and the many representations that I have had from constituents, I have believed for some time now that the collection system for on-street car parking can be seen as flawed and unfair. As with many other things, such as gas, electricity, telephone or internet usage, we pay for what we use. If you use an extra unit or two, you simply pay for that, but that is not the case with on-street parking. Customers are expected to estimate exactly how long their car will be parked there and pay for it in advance. If you are lucky enough to arrive back exactly as forecast, that is all very good and you have used what you paid for. If you arrive back early, you have paid for a service that you have not received. If you arrive back late, even a few minutes or so, you face a massive penalty, even if you are prepared to pay for your parking in full.

The one saving grace in Newry was that shoppers, businesspeople, churchgoers, visitors and anyone who was unsure of how long their duties would take could use one of the four manned car parks. They would receive a ticket on entry and pay in full when exiting. The Minister, however, who knows the area very well, has decided, in his wisdom, that the Lower Water Street, Abbey Way, Canal Bank 1 and Canal Bank 2 car parks will no longer be kiosk-operated. They have been pay and display since 7 January of this year. These four car parks can accommodate 615 cars. They are in the city centre with easy access to shops and the business community. I would like to see the cost-benefit analysis for that change. I believe that, if the added costs for the wardens needed to patrol those 615 spaces, the job losses and the revenue loss to our main street shops were factored into the calculation, very little, if anything, would be gained. The decision will cause further economic damage to the city of Newry. Traders are very angry about the decision, particularly as they were not consulted. I ask the Minister to freeze that decision and engage with the traders, the business community and local representatives to find a solution that suits the city. Those four car parks represent almost 50% of the car parking spaces available in Newry, excluding the two major shopping centres.

4.00 pm

According to DRD figures for 2011, 8,499 tickets were issued in Newry. Of those, 20% were estimated to have been issued as a result of a parking ticket having expired or not having been properly displayed. With the number of spaces that are monitored set to double, it is fair to assume that the number of tickets will double and that 11 people a day will be fined for being late. When looking at the figures, it is also interesting to see that only Belfast and Derry are higher than Newry in the ticket-issuing league.

The figures for Newry are way ahead of those for other towns and cities, such as Lisburn, Newtownabbey, Bangor, Craigavon, Ballymena and Newtownards, all of which have larger populations. Carrickfergus is similar in population size to Newry, yet it issued 18% of the tickets that Newry did. I am not a traffic warden basher, nor do I wish to see the towns mentioned suddenly set upon by an army of red coats. However, there is an imbalance, and the removal of the kiosk-operated car parks in Newry will unquestionably and dramatically add to that imbalance.

Today's discussion is about fairness: fairness to traders, fairness to shoppers and fairness to all who visit Newry by car. I have spoken to too many people who met an old friend and had that cup of coffee or whose solicitor delayed them for a while or who were delayed by a hairdresser who took 10 minutes longer than normal who have all faced a hefty penalty. I am included in that statistic. I am currently helping an 82-year-old man to appeal a decision for infringement that was given in Belfast. He was delayed in returning to his car because his colostomy bag burst and he needed to buy new clothes. He now faces a bill of £135 and has been shown very little sympathy. In the interest of fairness, I plead with Minister Kennedy to consult representatives, as outlined earlier, and to consider reinstating kiosk-operated car parks in Newry.

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development):

I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to this important Adjournment debate. I should say that I have asked officials to take note of the Hansard report. If I do not pick up any of the specific points that Members raised, I undertake to write to them following the debate.

I want to make it absolutely clear that I welcome the opportunity to debate issues relating to parking provision in Newry city centre. Many of you will know that I have the honour of being one of the constituency representatives for Newry and Armagh. I live in the area, not in the leafy suburbs but in the metropolitan area of Bessbrook. Therefore, I know the area very well. I shop in Newry and visit it very regularly. I also know the issues that are at stake.

By way of background, Newry city car parking provision comprises some 1,300 on-street and 1,100 off-street charged and free parking spaces. On-street parking spaces are very well used throughout the city centre. Approximately one third of on-street spaces are charged through pay-and-display machines, and this has not prevented on-street parking frequently touching capacity. Approximately two thirds of the off-street car parks operated by Roads Service are charged. Some spare capacity exists within the available spaces, but not a great deal. The third element in the equation is, of course, private car parking, which accounts for a further 1,900 spaces, a few hundred of which are free from charges.

Pressure has been placed on the number of available spaces by the implementation of the Department for Social Development's public realm scheme around Buttercrane and Merchants Quay, which has resulted in the removal of approximately 120 parking spaces. Naturally, this will be of grave concern to traders operating in the locality, who relied on the on-street car parking that was hitherto provided in that area, and let me restate that traders do matter.

My Department's overriding parking strategy is to encourage the availability and turnover of convenient short-stay spaces in our city and town centres, to be

achieved through enforcement and appropriate charging. The strategy further aims to reduce congestion and to improve accessibility and economic vitality in town centres. A number of years ago in Newry, car parking spaces, particularly those close to commercial areas, were frequently occupied by all-day parkers. The knock-on effect to businesses and local traders was that short-stay shoppers had limited opportunities to park conveniently close to shops and local amenities. Delivery vehicles found it equally difficult to serve businesses in the city, due to on-street parking spaces at the front of shops being taken up by cars parked from early morning. That resulted in an increase in double parking by delivery vehicles, which increased congestion and restricted traffic flows from a number of streets.

Officials in Roads Service commissioned a study, and a report examining the parking patterns throughout the city centre was produced in 2005, long predating my tenure as Minister. The study looked at four main issues, including congestion by vehicles travelling around the commercial area looking for an on-street space to park; vehicles failing to find an on-street space and parking illegally, thereby obstructing streets, causing associated road safety issues and leading to further congestion; the loss of 175 spaces at Railway Avenue and the area around the health centre; and the loss of short-stay shoppers arising from their inability to find a parking space, particularly in the more traditional shopping areas of Newry. The report recommended that, to make more efficient use of existing city centre parking spaces, on-street charging should be introduced by way of a controlled parking zone to cover several city centre streets and to help to promote regular turnover of parking spaces. It also recommended the introduction of loading bays at strategic points in the city centre. Through consultations carried out at the time, the location of the controlled parking zone and the loading bays received the full support of Newry and Mourne District Council, Newry Chamber of Commerce and the Newry City Centre Management Committee. A scheme costing £300,000 was implemented in September 2008 that included the installation of 72 on-street pay-and-display parking meters. Again, 2008 predates my tenure as Minister.

The controlled parking zone has been in operation for over four years and is proving successful with visitors and shoppers in the city. It benefits traders by encouraging parking turnover in areas close to shops and local amenities. My Department is in the process of converting all remaining kiosk-operated car parks across Northern Ireland to pay-and-display. That will deliver savings in the cost of operating the new parking enforcement and the car park management contract. The three remaining kiosk-operated car parks in Newry — at Canal Bank 1 and 2 and Abbey Way multistorey car park, which is known locally as cathedral car park, on Lower Water Street — will be converted during January and February 2013. That will mean that all six charged car parks in Newry city will operate as pay-and-display in exactly the same way as all other off-street car parks across Northern Ireland.

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: No. I am sorry, but I have to make progress.

I understand that concerns have been expressed by some Members that changing the payment regime from kiosk control to pay-and-display may disadvantage some who

use the facilities. However, it is important to stress that, the method of payment aside, there will be no other changes to the operation of the car parks. There is no change to the parking tariff or to the permitted parking period. The car parks will operate in exactly the same way as the existing pay-and-display car parks in Newry located in Basin Walk, Monaghan Street and New Street, with which the parking public are well familiar.

Indeed, pay-and-display has been the sole method of car parking payment available in many cities and towns across Northern Ireland for several years, supplemented recently with the Parkmobile system. When the car parks are operating as pay-and-display, the Parkmobile cashless payment system will be introduced. It provides a convenient alternative means of payment. With that system, drivers do not have to predict how long they need to park for, which was often the sole criticism levied against car parks moving from kiosk to pay-and-display. I have no doubt that the system will prove popular with many, as drivers will be able to start and stop their parking as required, only paying for the time used.

Members are, of course, aware that, after some months of hard work, I secured the Executive's agreement to fund my proposals to freeze car parking charges until at least 2015. That is good news for shoppers and traders alike. I am also committed to ensuring that there will be an important number of free parking spaces for motorists in many areas. In Newry, there are 309 free off-street car parking spaces still available in the city centre at River Street, Kilmorey Street East, Edward Street, Canal Bank 3, Bridge Street and Downshire Road.

In the pre-Christmas period in the past number of years, Roads Service has assisted local businesses with the provision of temporary parking in the North Street area. Each year, Roads Service has carried out repairs to that DSD-owned site to allow it to be opened as a temporary car park. In my view, it would be an important additional resource for car parking in Newry if that site could operate throughout the year, providing additional free car parking. I have therefore written to Minister McCausland in relation to that issue —

Mr D Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Mr Kennedy: I am almost out of time. I intend to further press his Department for positive action. Mindful of the public realm scheme proposed in the Buttercrane and Merchants Quay area of the city centre by the council and the DSD and notwithstanding their plans to provide some car parking spaces at Corry Square, further additional free-from-charge spaces will no doubt be welcome.

I met representatives of Newry Chamber of Commerce and Trade and Newry City Centre Management just before Christmas, and I understand their concerns and frustrations. I tried to set out then, as I have tried to set out today, the situation that, in many ways, I have inherited and have to deal with as Minister. I want to see a vibrant Newry, I want to see a successful Newry and I want to see Newry blossom. To that end, I will work with colleagues and interested stakeholders to achieve that.

Adjourned at 4.13 pm.

Written Ministerial Statements

The content of these written ministerial statements is as received at the time from the Ministers. It has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process.

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Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Access to Finance Strategy: Loan Funds

Published at 4.00 pm on Tuesday 4 December 2012

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): In the current economic climate it's harder than ever to get a bank loan or funding to invest in business development or business growth. Businesses are faced with lower levels of grant availability and more stringent lending regimes. The combination of this means it is often harder for them to finance growth.

Alternative sources of finance, such as micro-financing, debt finance, venture capital, technology transfer and business angel funding, have not been widely available in Northern Ireland.

Against this background it is clear that financial instruments, such as venture capital and debt financing, need to be made available to support local businesses. This will help to rebalance and rebuild our economy and to drive private sector growth.

Invest Northern Ireland has put in place a £100m Access to Finance Initiative to ensure that companies with high growth potential are not held back because they cannot access finance. Through the suite of funds Invest NI will be able to offer a continuum of funding for business seeking between £1k and £2m.

When fully implemented, the Access to Finance initiative will have five separate funds totalling more than £100m. This suite of support will ensure that SMEs and all spectrums of the development cycle have access to financial support through a range of equity investment and debt financed models.

As part of Invest NI's Access to Finance Strategy, two separate loan funds have been developed.

Growth Loan Fund

The £50million Growth Loan Fund was launched in June 2012, following the appointment of Whiterock Capital Partners to manage the Fund. The appointment was made after a CPD managed tender process.

The Growth Loan Fund expects to provide loan finance of approximately £10m per annum to SMEs based in Northern Ireland for the next 5 years. Individual Loans will typically be between £50k and £500k and, subject to the amount and quality of deal flow, the Fund anticipates making approximately 50 loans per annum.

Since its launch, Whiterock Capital has been building its team and developing a pipeline. More than 140 businesses have enquired about the availability of funding and two loans have been made with eight other loans approved by the Fund's investment committee.

Demand for loans is strong and targets for the remainder of the PfG period should be achieved. Invest NI will monitor demand closely and stands ready to increase the scale of funding in this area if so needed.

Small Business Loan Fund

The Small Business Loan Fund is a £5million debt financing initiative that will provide loans from £1,000 to £50,000 for small and micro businesses. Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) has been appointed to manage this Fund following a CPD managed tender process. The Fund will be launched as soon as all regulatory matters, including FSA approval are in place.

Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Published on Monday 10 December 2012

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Statement to the Assembly regarding the appointment of a Turnaround and Support Team to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

The Trust has faced significant challenges since its establishment in April 2007. In spite of support measures which have been put in place previously to assist the Trust, and the actions which have been taken, there needs to be further progress in the improvement of patient experience and care in the Northern area. There are no signs of sufficient improvement in waiting times at Emergency Departments (EDs) in spite of the earlier Hinds and Rutter Reviews of the Trust. The numbers of patients waiting over 12 hours at Emergency Departments have been unacceptably high throughout the year, and rising lately, and significant numbers of patients are waiting longer than 4 hours at the EDs.

The Trust Chief Executive has written to my Department to ask for further support in addressing these issues. Consequently, a small Turnaround and Support Team is being asked to complete a strategic overview to establish what changes and support might be required to accelerate progress. There will be a focus in particular on the challenges in relation to the Trust's ability to deliver on the services commissioned, including reducing waiting times in relation to unscheduled care. The Team will work alongside the support already being provided by the Health and Social Care Board and Public Health Agency. The Team will provide an assessment of the changes required to improve performance and to support the management of the Trust in the delivery of services.

I acknowledge fully the professionalism and commitment of the Trust management and the staff in addressing the challenges. Delivery of safe and effective quality services to all of our patients and clients, across all service areas, must be the over-riding priority, and it is for that reason that I have taken the decision to appoint an external expert team to support the Trust to help turn around performance in critical areas. It is clear that clinicians must be at the heart of the improvement process.

It is essential that the concerns are explicitly and fully addressed. I believe the external team will provide the comprehensive overview on the capacity and capability needed for that to happen. Sue Page, Chief Executive of NHS Cumbria, has agreed to lead the team. Details of other members and the terms of reference for the team will be announced shortly.

Community Pharmacy

Published on Friday 14 December 2012

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a Statement to the Assembly about community pharmacy remuneration. I am making the statement today in response to Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland's request that any public announcement would follow a planned meeting of the CPNI Board held on Thursday 13 December 2012.

I advised the Assembly on 13 March 2012 that it was clearly, highly regrettable that the reimbursement and remuneration of the community pharmacy sector has been the subject of two recent judicial reviews.

At that time I restated my clear commitment and determination to find a fair and appropriate way ahead on this difficult issue and advised that the appeal should go ahead because of its effect across government particularly the Regulatory Impact Assessment point.

Following a year long process involving DHSSPS/HSC Board and Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland (CPNI) and culminating in a period of intensive negotiations under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary DHSSPS, an accommodation has been reached that has allowed both sides to withdraw the respective appeal and cross-appeal of the Treacy J judgement of 21 December 2011 of community pharmacy remuneration arrangements. The agreed accommodation with CPNI now provides an opportunity to break the cycle of litigation on these matters.

The agreement with Community Pharmacy Northern Ireland will allow for a collaborative process to be developed in respect of the cost investigation and maintained in respect to the ongoing margin survey process. On the wider public interest point of Regulatory Impact Assessment, I am now advised that as there has been no collateral difficulty with this issue across Government to date, the RIA issue can be resolved through the administrative rather than the legal process.

My emphasis and priority has been to seek agreement and a way ahead that will recognise and support the new and evolving role of community pharmacists in the new world of reformed health and social care services.

The agreement with CPNI will allow important evidence to be gathered and will also allow community pharmacy to transition to a new way of working. Negotiations will also continue on a new contract for community pharmacy which will enable both independent contractors and commissioning authorities to further enhance and develop the role of community pharmacy in improving the health and well being of the Northern Ireland population.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Published on Friday 14 December 2012

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly regarding the position of Mr Jim Stewart, the Chair of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. I wish to advise the Assembly that I have terminated Mr Stewart's appointment with immediate effect.

Against a background of very serious and unresolved issues with the performance of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust on emergency care, I need to be sure that the leadership team are all working together to resolve the problem. Whatever may or may not have been said before Monday 10 December, it was wholly inappropriate for Mr Stewart to speak publicly as he did on Monday. His statement was very damaging to the reputation of the Trust and confirmed that Mr Stewart does not share my view that much better performance against the 12-hour standard for A&E Departments is both possible and essential in the short term. I have brought in the Turn Around and Support Team to help ensure that the required improvement is secured.

I firmly believe that public service values must be at the core of Health and Social Care. Non executive members who are appointed to the boards of HSC bodies are placed in positions of responsibility, and as such, must demonstrate the highest standards of corporate and personal conduct based on recognition that patients and clients always come first. Regrettably, in addition to a number of performance issues at the Northern HSC Trust, upon which the Chair was recently challenged by my Department, Mr Stewart fell short of these high standards in recent days. I have therefore taken all factors into account and decided that in the interests of the organisation that his position as Chair should be terminated.

My primary concern is and always will be the need for our Health and Social Care Trusts to provide safe and effective services for the patients and clients they serve. I want to say that I fully recognise the efforts, professionalism and dedication of all staff working at the Northern HSC Trust.

My Department will now move to fill the vacancy as soon as possible. Until a substantive Chair is appointed, the existing Board at the Trust will elect an interim chair from its Non Executive Directors.

Social Development

Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE)

Published at 10.00 am on Wednesday 9 January 2013

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): I wish to make a statement to the Assembly on my proposals for a Social Housing Reform Programme.

A fundamental review of the NI Housing Executive by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2011 found that the current model and structures no longer allow optimal delivery of either strategic housing or landlord services. I commissioned PwC to undertake a further series of meetings with stakeholders and the general consensus from participants was that the "Do nothing" option was not a realistic solution.

Whilst the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has had a long history of delivering social housing and has enjoyed the widespread support of Northern Ireland society, the current model is simply not sustainable, does not make best use of public resources nor does it allow sufficient flexibility and focus on supporting tenants and meeting their needs now and in the future.

My proposals on the way forward, which the Executive has now agreed, set out the strategic direction for the way social housing will be delivered in Northern Ireland. They aim to create effective structures for the social housing sector that will:

- put in place a sustainable housing system fit for the 21st Century;
- support business improvements in the social housing sector for the benefit of tenants and taxpayers;
- develop of a sustainable financing model for social housing that provides access to private funds to allow future investment;
- improve regulation and inspection of landlords; and
- provide effective services and good quality housing for tenants.

In effect these proposals not only build on the success of the past, but create structures that will ensure social housing delivery is on a sound basis to build for the future.

Key Proposals

My Department will have responsibility for overall Housing Strategy, policy, legislation and funding – setting the strategic vision for housing in Northern Ireland and developing the policies which underpin that vision. In addition, there will be significant enhancement of the Department's Regulation & Inspection Unit and function.

The Department will be supported in the delivery of strategy and policy by a Regional Housing Body staffed by housing professionals to deliver regional housing services, programmes and operational strategies, in effect the non-landlord functions of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The development of a new landlord function out with the public sector focusing on service to tenants and enabling access to private funding to allow for suitable investment.

The establishment of an Independent Social Housing Rent Panel which will agree annual rent levels based on a rental policy.

There is a need to consider the role of the Housing Council in the context of the proposed new housing structures; the role of Assembly scrutiny; and the Local Government Reform proposals and future functions of Councils. I propose, therefore, following consultation, to dissolve the Housing Council.

Going forward, I will bring forward proposals to ensure that the Regional Housing Body engages formally and works closely with the new 11 councils given in particular their new role for both land use and community planning.

Next steps

These proposals set out a compelling and sustainable vision for new structures to support the future development and delivery of social housing in Northern Ireland.

I acknowledge there is much detailed work to be done in taking these proposals forward. We can now move onto detailed consideration, design and engagement on how we can realise this vision. A change of this significance requires a detailed programme of projects which will deliver the necessary reform which will be supported by appropriate structures to involve all key stakeholders. The first phase of the programme will focus on the detailed design of each of the key strands of the proposed delivery model. Each project strand within the programme will prepare, design and develop operational solutions to support the proposed delivery model and each of these will be subject to consultation. The time-critical issues for the first phase will be the urgent consideration and evaluation of legislative changes which will be required to support the new delivery model.

I and my Department will work closely with the Social Development Committee in their scrutiny role in relation to the development of my proposals with the aim of maximising consensus and addressing any concerns that my Ministerial colleagues hold. I believe it is key for stakeholders to be consulted throughout the programme, therefore, processes for communication and engagement with staff and stakeholders will be an important part of the overall work programme.

Committee Stages

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Social Development

4 December 2012

Business Improvement Districts Bill [NIA 9/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Alex Maskey (Chairperson)
Mr Mickey Brady (Deputy Chairperson)
Ms Paula Bradley
Ms Pam Brown
Mr Gregory Campbell
Mrs Judith Cochrane
Mr Michael Copeland
Mr Sammy Douglas
Mr Fra McCann
Mr David McClarty

Witnesses:

Mrs Gail Cheesman	
Mr Henry McArdle	<i>Department for</i>
Mr Antony McDaid	<i>Social Development</i>

The Chairperson: We move to the substantive item on the agenda, the Business Improvement Districts Bill. We are in the Committee Stage of the Bill, which commenced on 18 September. The Committee received 14 responses to the Bill. We considered oral evidence from three key stakeholder organisations plus the Department. Given the Committee's consideration of evidence and response from the Department, it was agreed that formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill may commence today.

Members have set out their interim positions on the clauses, and I remind them that during the clause-by-clause scrutiny, they will be asked to set out their final positions as we work our way through the Bill. By way of process, where the majority of members support an amendment, the Clerk of Bills will take the proposals away and will draft the appropriate wording for consideration at our next meeting. Where members are unable to agree a clause, that must be clearly stated during this clause-by-clause scrutiny session. In such cases, members will be asked to set out their own proposed amendment, if they have one. In that case, the clause in question may be deferred until the next meeting, just to allow for further consideration.

To help the process along this morning, we have departmental officials present. I welcome Henry McArdle, Antony McDaid and Gail Cheesman. You are very welcome and thank you for being here this morning.

The Minister has responded to the issues raised by the Committee last week. Members have copies of his letters before them. There is also a copy of the advice given by the Examiner of Statutory Rules.

We are now able to commence clause-by-clause scrutiny.

I may have to leave to go to the Chamber before 10.30 am. If that is the case, I propose to hand over to Mickey Brady, the Deputy Chairperson. Are members content?

Members indicated assent.

Clause 1 (Arrangements with respect to business improvement districts)

The Chairperson: As members know, clause 1 sets out the arrangements relating to business improvement districts (BIDs) in a district council area. The Committee asked the Minister to provide reassurance that the role and responsibility of district councils will be made clear and unambiguous in the regulations. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Are there any proposed amendments to clause 1? Have you looked at the response? Are members content with clause 1 as it is?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 (Joint arrangements)

The Chairperson: This clause allows the Department to make provision through regulation enabling two or more district councils to make BID arrangements. The Committee sought clarification on the arrangements for BIDs that may have already been established in council areas in which the review of public administration (RPA) is subsequently implemented, with the result that councils merge. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Additional contributions and action)

The Chairperson: This clause defines the persons who may make financial contributions or take action that will facilitate the actions specified in BID arrangements taking place. The Committee strongly recommended that the Department establishes a fund to support the development of BID proposals, as is the case in Scotland. The Committee also recommended that the Department reviews the work of BID academies, and how they contribute to the development of BID expertise and provide support for the development of BIDs, with a view to establishing such an academy here.

Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 (Duty to comply with arrangements)

The Chairperson: Clause 4 provides a duty on a district council to comply with arrangements. The Committee sought assurances from the Minister that the regulations will be transparent and unambiguous. Again, you have the Minister's response in the letter.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Clause 5 (BID proposals)

The Chairperson: Clause 5 establishes that BID arrangements will come into force only when they are approved by a ballot. The Committee sought assurances that residents will be consulted as part of the BID proposal. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Mr Copeland: It is just a thought, and it is rooted in Castlereagh Borough Council's submission and considered view of clause 5, which states:

"BID proposals ... must include a statement of whether any of the costs incurred in developing the BID proposals, or holding of the ballot are to be recovered through BID levy."

The council's thoughts were that the statement should provide that it would be preferred if BID proposals must detail the cost incurred in developing the BID proposal, holding the ballot and delivering the BID proposal, and what costs are to be recovered from the BID levy. It is only through provision of that information that a district council would be in a position to review the potential for an improved business environment and local economic growth.

The Chairperson: Henry, do you or your colleagues wish to comment?

Mr Henry McArdle (Department for Social Development): Sorry, I did not catch that point.

Mr Copeland: Do you want me to read it again?

Mr McArdle: Yes.

Mr Copeland: I apologise for arriving late. Clause 12(5), "Imposition and —"

Mr McArdle: Sorry, are we talking about clause 12?

Mr Copeland: I am sorry. I have read the figure 5 wrongly. The comment refers to clause 12(5). I will raise the issue later.

The Chairperson: OK, Michael. The core of clause 5 is that there may be residents in a BID area, and the question on behalf of the Committee was whether those residents would have a say in the proposal by being formally consulted? That was also linked to people asking whether proposals would have to fit in with the existing framework of the time. Under RPA, there may well be community planning, area-based planning, decisions taken, and so on. I take it that BIDs under this legislation will have to comply with all of that.

Mr McArdle: Yes, they will have to fit in with all of that.

The Chairperson: Will that be clarified anywhere in regulations or is this just reassurance?

Mr McArdle: Although it may not be in the legislation, we are saying that a BID will not get approval from a council unless it is satisfied that they properly consulted on it. We are suggesting that we will set out in the guidance the sort of consultation that would be appropriate. In areas where there is a clear residential population, consultation with the community would be essential before a BID proposal would get the go ahead.

The Chairperson: All that would come back at some point to, for example, a Committee such as this?

Mr McArdle: Yes.

The Chairperson: OK, thank you for that.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 (Entitlement to vote in ballot)

The Chairperson: This clause sets out the entitlement to vote in a BID ballot and how it is to be determined. I think we considered that members of residents' groups should be included on the BID company board. I think the Department had a view about a possible departmental amendment to subsection (3). Henry, do you or one of your colleagues want to address that?

Mrs Gail Cheesman (Department for Social Development): Following questions from Committee members about whether charity shops would have to pay the levy, and queries about exemptions, we are proposing at subsection (3) to make it more explicit that any exemptions to paying rates will not automatically exempt anybody from having to pay the BID levy. There is a reference in subsection (3) to "chargeable to rates", and we will work with the Office of the Legislative Counsel to try to make it more explicit that no automatic exemptions are carried over from the rates bill into the BID levy. That is to tighten up on that and to try to prevent any confusion, if the Committee is content.

The Chairperson: Are members content with that explanation? Obviously, the Department will bring an amendment forward: am I right?

Mr F McCann: I think it was widened, when we were talking last week, to include not only charity shops but government buildings. I take it that it will mean all those buildings or offices.

Mr McArdle: If a building is chargeable to rates, if there is a rates liability — forget about any exemptions — that building will be included. It will then be up to the BID proposers to determine what, if any, exemptions there are. There may not be any, but they will determine whether they are full or partial exemptions, depending on the circumstances. It would be up to the BID proposers to determine that.

Mr F McCann: I take it that it will be on a "per building" basis. In some places, there may be three or four businesses in a building. So, is it "per building" and not "per business"?

Mr McArdle: No. It is per business.

Mr F McCann: How would that work if there were multiple businesses in a building? Will it be divided according to the rateable value of each business?

Mr Antony McDaid (Department for Social

Development): Each business has its own variable value and entitlement to vote, so they would be entitled to vote on the BID.

The Chairperson: Are members content with clause 6, subject to the amendment from the Department?

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Clause 7 (Approval in ballot)

The Chairperson: This clause sets out the four conditions that must be satisfied before a BID ballot can be regarded as approved. The Committee, if I remember correctly from last week, had no comment on this clause and was content. I do not think the Department has anything to add.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 7 agreed to.

Clause 8 (Approval in ballot – alternative conditions)

The Chairperson: Clause 8 allows those who have drawn up a ballot to set alternative conditions, such as a higher margin of net annual values, or numbers of votes cast, or both, before a BID ballot can be taken as approved. Members had no comment on that. Does that deal with the issue of the 25% approval?

Mr McArdle: Clause 8 talks about alternative conditions that may be set by the BID proposers. The BID proposer could suggest that the limit could be above 25%. The flexibility in all these circumstances is with the BID proposer. We are suggesting a minimum of 25%. We had the discussion about what Scotland and England do and we think this is a fair compromise.

The Chairperson: Fair enough. Thank you for that, Henry.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 (Power of veto)

The Chairperson: This clause confers the right on district councils to veto a BID proposal. It also provides that the circumstances under which that can happen can be prescribed by the Department. The Committee sought assurances that the prescribed circumstances referred to in the clause are unambiguous, particularly given that clause 10 relates to an appeal against the veto. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: As that is agreed, then, obviously, it indicates that the Committee accepts clause 9 as drafted.

Clause 10 (Appeal against veto)

The Chairperson: Clause 10 allows an eligible ratepayer who was entitled to vote in the BID ballot to appeal to the Department against a district council's decision to veto BID proposals. The Committee sought assurances that the consultation process would be detailed and the regulations

transparent and unambiguous. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Then I will indicate that the Committee accepts clause 10 as drafted.

Clause 11 (Commencement of BID arrangements)

The Chairperson: Clause 11 provides for the BID arrangements to come into force on the day detailed in the BID proposals. That has an implication for the BID company assuming that role and why it is councils that have responsibility for that in the Bill. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Then I formally indicate that the Committee accepts clause 11 as drafted.

Clause 12 (Imposition and amount of BID levy)

The Chairperson: This clause establishes that a BID levy can be raised only —

Mr Copeland: Castlereagh Borough Council, through its economic development subcommittee, asked — and I believe it was notified to the Committee Clerk on 29 August — about the imposition and amount of the BID levy. They referred to clause 12(5), which states that BID proposals:

“must include a statement of whether any of the costs incurred in developing the BID proposals, or holding of the ballot are to be recovered through BID levy”.

The council feels that rather than a statement being provided, it would be preferred if the BID proposals read:

“must detail the costs incurred in developing the BID proposal, holding the ballot and delivering the BID proposal and what costs are to be recovered from the BID levy”.

The raison d'être for that is:

“Only through provision of this information will District Council's be in a position to review the potential for an improved business environment and local economic growth.”

arising from the establishment of a BID.

Mr McArdle: We looked at that suggestion when it first came to the Department. We responded to it in our detailed response to the Committee. We are effectively saying that the wording is in line with what is happening in other jurisdictions. By and large, we think that it serves the same purpose. Clause 12(5) says that the proposals:

“must include a statement of whether any of the costs incurred in developing the BID proposals, or holding of the ballot are to be recovered through BID levy.”

As far as we are concerned, it is, by and large, the same thing except that there has been an elaboration of what we are saying. The effect is still the same. We said at that stage that we did not see any point in accepting that suggestion.

Mr McDaid: The information supplied to the council will detail the business plan, which will contain details of

the services that they will look to carry out as a result of the BID and how much it would cost. A lot of financial information will be provided to the council.

Mr Copeland: In your view, is that financial information sufficient to meet Castlereagh Borough Council's requirement that the BID proposals:

"must detail the costs incurred in developing the BID proposal holding the ballot and delivering the BID proposals and what costs are to be recovered from the BID levy".

Will that information be there although, perhaps, not in the format that Castlereagh Borough Council was looking for?

Mr McDaid: As Henry said, it sounds very similar; it is just that the wording is slightly different. All that information is available to the council. The council may choose not to recover the costs. It may choose to do the ballot and not charge the BID. All that will be developed in consultation with the council in the first place.

Mr Copeland: I would like the intervention to be noted.

The Chairperson: Fair enough. It will be reported by Hansard in any case. No amendments have been proposed.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 12 agreed to.

Clause 13 (Liability and accounting for BID levy)

The Chairperson: Clause 13 provides that BID proposals must specify who is liable for payment of the BID levy, how that liability is to be determined and how levy moneys are to be paid. The Committee sought further clarification on why this responsibility must reside with the council. Are members content with the Minister's response?

Mr Copeland: Thank you again for your indulgence, Chairperson. This is the last observation that I will make on behalf of Castlereagh Borough Council.

Clause 13(4) says:

"Any amount of BID levy for which an eligible ratepayer is liable is to be paid to the district council which made the arrangements."

I am not representing Castlereagh Borough Council here, but I have a fair idea of what it is after. It asks:

"In accordance with your consultation findings and discussions with the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) should this be revised to reflect collection by Land and Property Services (LPS)?"

The council goes on to say that it is widely supportive of the Bill and welcomes the flexibility.

Mr McArdle: We are saying that the BID levy has to be paid to the district council. We have stated that the BID levy is considered to be a tax. The BID company cannot collect the tax or issue the bills. The bills will be issued on behalf of the council.

Concerns were raised during the consultation about the role of the district councils. We have to bear in mind that councils in the rest of the UK do all this. They issue bills and collect them. The councils raised concerns

because they felt that they did not have any expertise in this matter. We discussed and agreed with DFP and Land and Property Services that they would carry out a role in issuing bills if requested by a council. Councils can use that service, which will be available from Land and Property Services, but they can make their own arrangements if they want to do so. That is why clause 13(4) is worded in this way.

Mr Copeland: Will there be an associated cost to the council arising from the service provided by Land and Property Services?

Mr McArdle: There is a potential for costs in all of this. Experience differs across the rest of the UK. Some councils charge a fee and others do not. Some councils provide the service free as part of their contribution towards the BID. However, there is provision in the legislation for a fee to be charged. Land and Property Services will charge a fee.

Mr Copeland: I can only accept what the officer said. I again ask that the comments of the council are noted.

The Chairperson: OK, Michael.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 13 agreed to.

Clause 14 (BID Revenue Account)

The Chairperson: No comments were made about clause 14.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 14 agreed to.

Clause 15 (Administration of BID levy etc.)

The Chairperson: The Committee made no comment on clause 15 either.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 15 agreed to.

Clause 16 (Duration of BID arrangements etc.)

The Chairperson: The Committee made no comment on clause 16 and had nothing further to add.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 16 agreed to.

Clause 17 (Regulations about ballots)

The Chairperson: The Committee made no comment on clause 17 either.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 17 agreed to.

Clause 18 (Power to make further provision)

The Chairperson: Clause 18 will allow the Department to make consequential and transitional provisions where necessary. We sought further clarification on whether any

provisions made under that clause would be consulted on. Are members content with the Minister's response on that?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: I formally indicate that the Committee accepts clause 18, as drafted.

Clause 19 (Further provision as to regulations)

The Chairperson: Clause 19 provides that any regulations made in the Bill, other than the regulations listed under clause 19(3), are subject to the negative resolution procedure in the Assembly. I advise members that the Examiner of Statutory Rules has suggested that the Committee may wish to consider whether clause 19 should be amended so that regulations made under clauses 6(3) and 17(2)(b) on the eligibility of ratepayers to hold ballots are subject to draft affirmative procedure rather than negative resolution. Is the Department prepared to accept that?

Mr McArdle: We are content with that.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Clause 19 agreed to.

Clause 20 (Crown application)

The Chairperson: Clause 20 provides that the Bill applies to the Crown. I advise members that the Committee made no comment on clause 20. Are members content with clause 20, as drafted?

Mr Campbell: I am definitely content with that one.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 20 agreed to.

Clause 21 (Interpretation)

The Chairperson: Clause 21 provides the definition of terms used in the Bill. I do not think that there was anything further to add on that.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 21 agreed to.

Clause 22 (Short title)

The Chairperson: Clause 22 provides that the new legislation shall be known as the Business Improvement Districts Act (Northern Ireland) 2012. Members made no comment on clause 22.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 22 agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: I advise members that that concludes the formal clause-by-clause scrutiny of the Bill. On Thursday, the Committee will consider a draft Committee Bill report.

Mr F McCann: I do not know whether I can do this on Thursday, but we have talked about property owners not being included in the legislation. If there is a row of shops and people are living between the shops, and the

businesses decide that there is much-needed work to be done to a range of shops, can landlords, or those who own living accommodation between the businesses, take part? It would be crazy if faults were found across a number of businesses and that the only people to get work done were those who owned those businesses.

Mr McArdle: We can clarify that. If there is a row of shops and there are tenants in some shops and none in others, but there are landlords —

Mr F McCann: I am talking about people in living accommodation.

Mr McArdle: Do you mean residential?

Mr F McCann: Yes.

Mr McArdle: I am sorry. No. This is about business initiatives and business improvement districts. Residents will be consulted as part of the process, but they will not be asked to pay a levy or to vote.

Mr F McCann: What I am saying is that, say for talk's sake, much-needed work was done to the whole block and there were residents living between businesses, it would be easier if work was also done to the living accommodation. Can the people who live there buy into the work that may take place?

Mr McDaid: Yes, on a voluntary basis. However, that would not be formal.

Mr F McCann: It would be cheaper to buy into that than it would be to pay individually.

Mr McArdle: It would. I gave you the example of the Clarkston business improvement district. As I said, there is a big street in Clarkston with rows of shops on either side, but there are also residential properties. The whole community bought into that BID, and the residents in those properties have benefited from the improvements in the area. They did not stop the improvements and start them again when they went past the houses. They included everything in the proposal.

However, it would be up to the BID proposers. They will put their money in, and it will be up to them how they spend their money and determine whether they should include the residential properties in their proposals. To my mind, it would be daft not to include them, but it would be up to the BID proposers.

Mrs Cheesman: If anyone makes a voluntary contribution, they would not be entitled to a vote. It would only be those who are —

The Chairperson: You would presume that if someone is prepared to make a voluntary contribution, they would be satisfied with the result.

Mrs Cheesman: Yes.

The Chairperson: I think the point being made is that you could have a row of shops, with residential properties, whether it is a front door to a flat above. You see that in Stranmillis and in places such as that. You would presume that if someone was going to do work in that block, they would not leave a door —

Mr McArdle: No. They would not leave that.

Mr F McCann: You would like to think that they would not.

The Chairperson: The question we were asking is whether people, on a voluntary basis —

Mr F McCann: Buy into it.

The Chairperson: — can subscribe, and the answer is yes.

Mr McArdle: Yes.

The Chairperson: OK. We completed that in quick time.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Committee for Justice

6 December 2012

Criminal Justice Bill [NIA 10/11-15]

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Alex Easton
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Seán Lynch
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Patsy McGlone

Witnesses:

Mr Tony Kavanagh *Department of Justice*

The Chairperson: We will now have the formal clause-by-clause consideration of the Criminal Justice Bill. A paper setting out the final position in relation to the deliberations that have taken place on the Bill has been circulated to members. For ease of reference, the amendments to the Bill have been considered by the Committee and are attached to this briefing paper. This morning, the Department has provided details of an amendment that it intends to bring forward to rectify a possible incompatibility with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) concerning licence arrangements relating to the release of young offenders who are convicted of certain serious crimes. That letter is item 2 of your tabled pack. Given that we have only received it, the Committee will note the intended amendment and not form any view if members feel that we are not able to form a view. We will look at that amendment shortly.

Do members wish to look at the amendment rather than just note it? We have officials with us who can talk to us about it. If members feel that we can get an agreed position now, we could go ahead and do that. Or do members feel that, procedurally, because of the late notice, they prefer to note it?

Mr Elliott: It might be better to at least hear from the officials.

The Chairperson: Let us have the officials forward quickly then, please, and we will run through it. It is very late for us to be getting it. We are meant to be agreeing things by this point

Mr Tony Kavanagh (Department of Justice): Thank you, Chair, and I apologise for the late submission of the

amendment. I will explain the circumstances as to why it worked out like that. I am Tony Kavanagh from the youth justice unit in the Department. I have been responsible for taking this issue forward and drafting the instructions for counsel. Briefly, the background of this is that article 45(2) detention orders are used for particularly serious crimes that children commit. They are rarely used. We have had about five in the past 10 or 12 years. We have not had one in the past four years, but they do come around from time to time. We have two young people serving detention orders at the moment.

The way the legislation works is that, at any point during the period of detention, the Minister of Justice can release the individual on licence and, if necessary, recall them from licence if they break the conditions. One of the young people has taken a judicial review in relation to how we operate that particular order. Although that case has not been completed yet — the hearing is on 17 December — counsel's advice to us is that there is a serious risk that the current arrangements are not compatible, in that they provide a Minister rather than an independent judicial body with powers to determine release and recall. That makes it incompatible in general with aspects of the ECHR, but also inconsistent with the operation of other orders that are similar, such as the public protection orders and even life sentences.

What we have done to correct that in the amendment is to remove the Minister from the decision-making process and tie it in to the standard way of dealing with this, through the Parole Commissioners. What will happen now is that if we have any more of those orders, the judge will set a period of custody that the person must serve before being considered for release on licence. At that point, that case must be referred to the Parole Commissioners for them to consider whether the individual should be released on licence. If they are released on licence, they are also responsible for the recall. Previously, it was down to officials in the Department and the Minister; now, it will be a matter for the judge setting the effective tariff on these orders, and the Parole Commissioners will decide on the same basis that they decide to release or recall adult prisoners who are subject to public protection orders. The key consideration in this is the protection of the public. That is what it is there for. It is because we have these two cases, and we need to address the law because it is at serious risk of an incompatibility case.

The Chairperson: Are members content with the amendment that is before the Committee?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Members, let us go through the clauses. Feel free to stop me at any point if you want to make a comment, not agree to things, or abstain. First, we will deal with the sex offender provisions.

Clause 1 (Review of indefinite notification requirements)

The Chairperson: No issues were highlighted in relation to this clause. Keep the briefing paper beside you. The first couple of pages have a quick description of each of the clauses. Clause 1 is around the review of indefinite notification requirements. No issues were highlighted.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2 agreed to.

Clause 3 (Offences committed in an EEA State other than the United Kingdom)

The Chairperson: The Committee has agreed that clause 3 should be amended as proposed by the Department, and the amendments are at tab 1 of the briefing paper. Are members still content with how the Bill is being amended by the Department?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: OK, just to keep the procedure right, first of all, we need to agree the amendments as proposed, and then the clauses. So, are members content with the amendments proposed by the Department?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 3 agreed to.

Clause 4 agreed to.

Schedule 1 (Schedule 3A to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, as inserted)

The Chairperson: No issues have been highlighted on schedule 1. Is the Committee content with schedule 1 as drafted?

Mr McCartney: What page are we on now?

The Chairperson: This is schedule 3A to the Sexual Offences Act 2003.

The Committee Clerk: Page 9.

Mr McCartney: On page 7 of the Bill is clause 7, which deals with the retention of fingerprints and DNA profiles.

The Committee Clerk: We have not dealt with that yet. The Chairman has put the questions on the sex offenders clauses and then the schedule that is related to the sex offenders clauses. We will return to that.

Mr McCartney: That is OK.

Question, That the Committee is content with the schedule, put and agreed to.

Schedule 1 agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: Human trafficking, then. Let us go to those clauses. There are two of them, and then we will go to the retention of fingerprints. There is an additional amendment that the Department has brought forward with regard to sex offender notification. I will let Christine talk us through that.

The Committee Clerk: Members, we have now been through the clauses that relate to the sex offender notification requirements and the schedule related to those. There is also a new proposed additional amendment from the Department in relation to sex offender notification. That is the clause that we are going to consider now, because, depending how you agree these clauses, there may be knock-on amendments to later clauses. Members should turn to tab 5 in their folders.

There you see the wording of the additional sex offender notification provision. It is intended to address the gap in current legislation concerning details and information to be provided to the PSNI by offenders who travel within the UK. The Department intends to introduce this amendment at Consideration Stage, and members indicated, at the meeting on 4 December, that they are content with the wording of the amendment. The Chairman will now put the question on that additional provision.

The Chairperson: We agreed to it on 4 December.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

Clause 5 (Trafficking people for sexual exploitation)

The Chairperson: Though the Committee is content to support the introduction of the new human trafficking offences covered in clauses 5 and 6, concern has been expressed that a summary conviction in relation to those offences could attract a sentence of less than six months or a fine. In response, the Minister is considering the implications of making offences triable on indictment only. However, that work has not yet been completed. The report on the Bill will reflect the Committee's concerns and its agreement to review the position. Therefore, members, there is no amendment before us, so we are considering clauses 5 and 6 as they stand.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, put and agreed to.

Clause 5 agreed to.

Clause 6 agreed to.

Schedule 2 (Articles 63B to 63O of the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, as inserted)

The Chairperson: Clause 7 gives effect to schedules 2 and 3 to the Bill, and inserts the new retention framework for fingerprints and DNA profiles in the Police and Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and makes consequential amendments. Some members have indicated that they have concerns in relation to the new retention framework. As members' view of clause 7 may depend on the decisions reached in relation to schedules 2 and 3, I will put the questions regarding schedules 2 and 3 before dealing with clause 7.

The Department has informed the Committee of three areas in relation to schedule 2 where it intends to bring forward amendments at Consideration Stage. The first amendment relates to article 63C of the 1989 Order, to clarify the provision by linking retention to the perceived utility of the material rather than to the conclusion of the investigation. The amendment is at tab 2 of the briefing paper. Is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendment relating to article 63C?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: The next three amendments relate to article 63D of the 1989 Order and set out on the face of the Bill the prescribed circumstances. Those amendments are also at tab 2 in the briefing paper. Do members want to comment on any aspects of that?

Mr McCartney: I suppose that, at this stage, in a broad sense, I want to deal with the DNA and fingerprints aspects of it. Throughout the process, we have raised the point that the legislation is obviously the result of a European Court of Human Rights decision in the Marper case. That case was basically about the blanket nature of the retention, particularly for people who are not convicted. We have some concerns that this may not be compliant with the standard required by the court, particularly around the presumption of innocence. We have severe reservations. For today's purposes, we are just notifying you and the Committee that it will be our intention to table a number of amendments at Further Consideration Stage to outline that concern.

Mr A Maginness: I share those concerns with my colleague here. We will obviously consider any amendments that are tabled, with a view to supporting them.

The Chairperson: Is that commentary around all this aspect just to do with the DNA? Are you going to abstain on pretty much all the areas to do with this element of the Bill?

Mr McCartney: There are areas, obviously, where rules around destruction are straightforward. The area of disagreement is for people not convicted.

The Chairperson: I will try to walk us through this and make sure that we record that where you want it recorded.

In respect of article 63D, is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendments? They are all in tab 2. It is in respect of the prescribed circumstances that would be on the face of the Bill.

Mr McCartney: We have reservations. This is also around the use of caution and the penalty notice under section 60 of the Justice Act 2011.

The Chairperson: In terms of that —

Mr Elliott: Sorry, Chair. For the purposes of clarification, is that around the retention of DNA for those who have been cautioned?

Mr McCartney: Yes. It will treat them as a recordable offence.

Mr Elliott: So, it was what we discussed on Tuesday.

Mr McCartney: Yes.

The Chairperson: Can I record Sinn Féin and SDLP abstention and DUP and Ulster Unionist assent?

The Committee Clerk: You need to put the Question.

The Chairperson: For the second time, is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendments relating to article 63D?

Question put.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

The Chairperson: The fifth amendment relates to an additional provision permitting limited retention in cases where a penalty notice has been issued under section 60 of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. That amendment, again, is at tab 2 of the briefing paper. This is around the penalty notice issue. I will again assume that the SDLP and Sinn Féin will want to abstain, but I need to put the Question formally. Is the Committee content with the new provision as proposed by the Department?

Question put.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question, That the Committee is content with schedule 2, subject to the proposed amendments, put.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Schedule 2, as amended, accordingly agreed to.

Schedule 3 (Amendments: fingerprints, DNA profiles, etc.)

The Chairperson: The Department has informed the Committee of two amendments to schedule 3 that it intends to bring forward at Consideration Stage. The first amendment relates to bringing completion of the diversionary youth conference within the framework on the same basis as a caution. The amendment is at tab 3 of the briefing paper. Is the Committee content with the new provision as proposed by the Department?

Question put.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

The Chairperson: The second amendment is to correct a drafting error in paragraph 6 and can also be found at tab 3 of the briefing paper. Is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendment relating to paragraph 6?

Members indicated assent.

The Chairperson: Those were the two amendments, so now let us agree schedule 3.

Question, That the Committee is content with schedule 3, subject to the proposed amendments, put.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 7 (Retention of fingerprints, DNA profiles, etc.)

The Chairperson: Do members have any other proposed amendments to clause 7? There are no amendments being brought forward at this stage.

Mr McCartney: Clause 7 is back to page 7?

The Chairperson: I am assuming that you want to abstain.

Question put, That the Committee is content with the clause.

The Committee divided:

Ayes 4; Noes 0; Abstentions 5.

Ayes

Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mr Givan, Mr Humphrey.

Noes

No members voted no.

Abstentions

Mr A Maginness, Mr Lynch, Mr McCartney, Mr McGlone, Ms McCorley.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 7 agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: Now, we need to deal with the new amendment that was brought forward. If members have

no issues with it, I will put the Question. Is the Committee content with the new provision the departmental official outlined earlier in relation to licence arrangements relating to the release of young offenders convicted of certain serious crimes?

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: Hopefully, you are bearing with us, members. It is a little bit higgledy-piggledy, I know, but we will get there. At this stage, we will deal with the departmental amendment to provide additional provision in relation to the registered intermediary scheme, as there is a consequential amendment to clause 9 that is linked to this. The Department informed the Committee of an amendment that it intends to bring forward at Consideration Stage to make additional provision in relation to the registered intermediary scheme. The amendment is at tab 4 of the briefing paper. The Committee agreed that it was content with the proposal and wording of the amendment at the meeting on 22 November.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

Clause 8 agreed to.

Clause 9 (Commencement and transitional, etc. provisions)

The Chairperson: As a consequence of a proposed new provision to make additional provision in relation to the registered intermediary scheme, the Department has provided an amendment to clause 9. That is at tab 4. You can refer to your tabled pack as well. On the very last page of it, there is another amendment to clause 9.

The Committee Clerk: Members, there are two consequential amendments to clause 9. One relates to the new clause to do with the registered intermediaries. The other relates to the new clause that you agreed today. The departmental official briefed you on that earlier. Clause 9 will now have two consequential amendments as a result of agreeing the two new provisions. You are being asked to agree clause 9 as amended in two places. One is in your pack; the registered intermediaries scheme at tab 4. The other is in your tabled pack, on the very last page. There are two consequential amendments because you are adding two new provisions into the Bill.

Question, That the Committee is content with the clause, subject to the proposed amendments, put and agreed to.

Clause 9 agreed to.

Clause 10 agreed to.

Schedule 4 (Repeals)

The Chairperson: The Department is proposing an amendment to schedule 4. The amendment is required as a result of the amendment to clause 3. The amendment is at tab 1. It is a consequential amendment.

The Committee Clerk: Yes, it is a consequential amendment, because you have agreed an amendment to clause 3.

The Chairperson: Is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendment?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with schedule 4, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Schedule 4 agreed to.

New Clause

The Chairperson: The Committee agreed at the meeting on 4 December to table an amendment to abolish the offence of scandalising the court. The report on the Bill will reflect that the Committee will write to the Speaker to seek his views on the admissibility of the amendment prior to tabling it. That will decide whether it is within the scope of the Bill.

Question, That the Committee is content with the new clause, put and agreed to.

New clause agreed to.

The Chairperson: Obviously, we will await the Speaker's ruling on the admissibility of it.

Long Title

The Committee Clerk: Members, we are now at the end of clause-by-clause consideration of the Bill. The Committee must now consider the long title of the Bill. As a consequence of other amendments that have been agreed, there is the proposed new provision to make additional provision in relation to the registered intermediary scheme, and the proposed new provision that you agreed earlier after the briefing from departmental officials. There are now two amendments to the long title. The first amendment is at tab 4 in your packs. It is at the bottom of appendix A, where it says, "Long title". It is adding in:

"and to amend Article 21BA of the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999."

That is a consequential amendment because you are adding in the new clause on the registered intermediary scheme.

On the back page of your tabled pack, there is another amendment to the long title. Again, it is a consequential amendment to the new provision that you have agreed today. It reads:

"and to provide for the release on licence of persons detained under article 45(2) of the Criminal Justice (Children) (Northern Ireland) Order 1998."

The Chairperson: Is the Committee content with the proposed departmental amendment to the long title of the Bill?

Members indicated assent.

Question, That the Committee is content with the long title, subject to the proposed amendment, put and agreed to.

Long title agreed to.

The Chairperson: We will get the final report for next 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 7 December 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the personal lawyers of witnesses in the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry are allowed to attend the Inquiry in the capacity of 'companions'.
(AQW 15781/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Victims and survivors are welcome to bring a companion with them when speaking either to the Statutory Inquiry or to the Acknowledgement Forum. There is no bar on a lawyer attending in the capacity of a companion. However, the role of the companion is to assist and support the victim or survivor in recounting their experiences. It is not the role of a companion to represent them in a legal capacity or otherwise. There is no fee for anyone who attends as a companion and this would include lawyers acting in that capacity.

Literacy and Numeracy: Primary Schools

Mr Rogers asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to provide details of their announcement on 10 October 2012 about providing extra teaching jobs to address specifically the issues associated with literacy and numeracy in primary schools.
(AQW 16002/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Education, as lead department for the Improving Literacy and Numeracy Signature Project, will be responsible for developing Delivery Plans in the coming weeks for both programmes that have been designed under this project, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity. Once developed, we will discuss with departments the details of their plans particularly in relation to appropriate delivery mechanisms and target beneficiaries. Once agreed, funding can be drawn down by the department.

Social Investment Fund

Mrs Dobson asked First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 15293/11-15, to detail the amount of money spent on each activity; and the total funding remaining in the Social Investment Fund.
(AQW 16069/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The net funding spent to date on finalising policy proposals and establishing the Steering Groups is detailed in the table below:

Spend	Amount
Public consultation, engagement and information sessions	£16,899
Initial Gateway Review	£10,000
Central Procurement Directorate costs to tender for technical assistance support	£6,669
2-day workshop for nominees of 9 Steering Groups	£1,347
Total	£34,915

A further £360,000 has been allocated for the technical assistance support. The funding remains ring-fenced at £80 million and the remainder of the funding is still available.

Economy: Executive Meetings/Forums

Ms Brown asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on Executive meetings and forums focusing on the economy.
(AQO 2768/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The economy is a standing agenda item of each Executive meeting. The Executive meeting of 25 October 2012 was, in addition, dedicated exclusively to the discussion of economic matters and the Executive commissioned further work which it discussed at its meeting on 7 November.

The Executive's Budget Review Group has met on six occasions since May 2011. At its most recent meeting on 27 September, the Budget Review Group discussed the progress of its work programme, including alternative options for accessing finance; realising the value of surplus and under-utilised assets; the review of Arm's Length Bodies; and other priority areas. The Budget Review Group will meet again on 12 December 2012.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, in relation to the £12 million allocated to the Childcare Strategy, (i) to detail the amount of the allocation that has already been spent; (ii) for a breakdown of the administration and project costs; (iii) to list the specific projects and the amount of funding allocated to each; (iv) to detail the costs associated with the research being undertaken; (v) if no costs have been paid for research to date, to detail projected costs of research being undertaken; (vi) how many further bids for funding are with the Department for consideration; and (vii) to outline the overall amount of these additional bids.

(AQW 16451/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness:

- (i) To date, a total of £322,000 has been spent from the Executive's Childcare Fund and we have taken decisions that would allow up to a further £4.5 million to be allocated from the Fund.
- (ii) The resources in the Childcare Fund are ring-fenced to support the development of the Childcare Strategy. They are not used to support administration costs.
- (iii) The first tranche of awards from the Executive's Childcare Fund were made in 2011/12 and totalled £322,000. This £322,000 was allocated as follows:

DHSSPS £250,000:

- a to expedite work undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board to reduce the backlog in the registration and inspections of childminding and daycare settings and to implement revised procedures to mitigate future delays.

OFMDFM £20,000:

- b to enable PlayBoard to provide additional grant funding to the South Armagh Childcare Consortium. This was funding to enable the Consortium to continue its development towards financial sustainability.

DCAL £52,000:

- c allocated to NI Screen to extend the after schools Film Club in extended service schools.

(iv) & (v) OFMDFM has commissioned RSM McClure Watters to conduct research to provide a detailed up-to-date review of current childcare provision and the current demand for childcare places. The projected cost of this research is approximately £90,000 and is being funded from OFMDFM's Research Budget. OFMDFM is also funding a research project on childminding. This research, which is being conducted by the National Children's Bureau, aims to (a) explore issues of practice and quality within childminding and (b) to assess the impact of the grouping of children of different ages within childcare. The projected cost of this research is approximately £100,000 and it is also being funded from OFMDFM's Research Budget.

- (vi) Eleven bids were received from five departments in response to a second call for bids to the Childcare Fund. We have agreed to approve five of these bids.

- (vii) The five successful bids were for up to £4.5 million as follows:

DHSSPS: up to £250,000 for a focused review of the childcare needs of vulnerable families;

DHSSPS: up to £500,000 to enhance childcare provision for children with a disability;

DE/DHSSPS: up to £370,000 for enhanced development opportunities for pre-school children;

DCAL: After school film clubs, up to £362,000; and

DEL: up to £3 million to expand Steps to Work Childcare provision.

Officials are working with the relevant departments to ensure the maximum amount of spend in these projects.

Older People: 040 Project

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail the nature and location of any services for older people delivered through the 040 Project.

(AQW 16827/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The 040 Project is not funded or managed by OFMDFM. It is an EU Northern Periphery Programme project which we understand ran from 2008-10 and was funded under the 2007-2013 programme.

Further information can be obtained from the O4O website – <http://www.o4os.eu/northern-ireland.asp>

Social Investment Fund

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister which groups from the East Belfast constituency have been consulted regarding the Social Investment Fund.

(AQW 16869/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Steering Group for the Belfast East Social Investment Zone is leading the area planning process in this constituency. In order to fulfil their role, the steering group, supported by their appointed consultant, has undertaken an extensive engagement programme. The purpose of this engagement is to ensure that the views of stakeholders operating within the constituency have an opportunity to inform the development of the area plan.

Since area planning commenced on 17 October, 58 voluntary and community groups have been engaged to date in the process:

- Ballybeen Women's Centre
- Ballymac Youth Club
- Belfast FC
- Belfast YMCA
- Bloomfield Community Association
- Bloomfield Presbyterian Church
- Braniel Community Association
- Bryson Lagan Sports
- Castlereagh Business Association
- Charter NI
- Christians against Poverty
- Clarawood Community Association
- Clarawood Tenants' Association
- Clarawood Youth Club
- Corrymeela
- Creative Exchange
- Dundonald Credit union
- Dungoyne FC
- East Belfast Alternatives
- East Belfast Community Development Agency
- East Belfast Counselling
- East Belfast Enterprises
- East Belfast Independent Advice Counselling
- East Belfast Partnership
- East Belfast Surestart
- EXIT
- GEMS NI
- Glenburn Methodist Church
- Greenway Women's Centre
- Hanwood Trust
- Helping Hands Autism Support Group
- Inner East Youth Project
- Kirkpatrick Memorial Presbyterian Church
- Lower Castlereagh Community Group
- Mount Merrion Parish Church
- Oasis
- Orangefield Presbyterian Church
- Orangefield Presbyterian/Clonduff
- Pitt Park Women's Group
- Short Strand Community Forum
- Short Strand Partnership
- Short Strand Traders
- St Mary's Silver Thread
- Stepping Stones
- Sydenham Community Development agency
- Sydenham United FC
- Sydenham Neighbourhood Community Watch
- T13
- Tagit Fishing Club
- Templemore Avenue Schools Trust
- Templemore Users Trust
- The Dock
- The Oak Project
- Titanic People
- Tullycarnet Neighbourhood Collective
- Tullycarnet Regeneration
- Walkway Community Association

Willowfield Parish Community Association In addition, in East Belfast, there has been engagement with other key stakeholders, including some local schools, during the area planning process.

Wider consultation on the Social Investment Fund with councils and other statutory organisations commenced earlier in the development of the SIF programme and remains ongoing.

Historical Institutional Abuse: Forum

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made on establishing an acknowledgement forum for victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse.

(AQW 16971/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Acknowledgement Forum's registration scheme launched on 1 October 2012. Victims and survivors' appointments to come and speak in confidence to the Forum commenced on Monday 22 October.

Children's Services: Duplication

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister in which areas are Departments duplicating the provision of services to children; and what action they will take to reduce duplication, given their overall responsibility for the children's strategy.

(AQW 16973/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Departments, their Agencies, Arms Length Bodies and organisations they support deliver a very wide range of services to children including aspects of healthcare, education, justice, transport and many others. The Executive is doing all that it can to ensure the most cost effective provision of services not only to children and young people, but to all of our citizens.

We recognise that many of the issues which children and young people face are cross-cutting and require co-operation across all departments.

Delivering Social Change is a comprehensive new framework which seeks to co-ordinate key actions between departments in order to deliver a sustained reduction in poverty and associated issues across all ages; improve children and young people's health, wellbeing and life opportunities and break the long-term cycle of multi-generational problems.

By introducing this framework, all departments will work together to deal with these issues. Such an approach should encourage greater policy integration and will avoid the potential for duplication.

Historical Institutional Abuse: North/South Discussions

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the discussions with Ministers in the Irish Republic on victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse who travelled as children from one jurisdiction of this island to an institution in the other, including any proposed actions.

(AQW 17067/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We wrote to the Irish Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter TD, on 6 August 2012 raising our concerns in relation to allegations that children suffered abuse in a number of institutions that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Executive. In response, Minister Shatter confirmed that the issue was under his consideration.

On 21 November, Junior Ministers met with the Irish Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Frances Fitzgerald TD, in the NSMC offices in Armagh, to discuss children's issues. At that meeting, Minister Fitzgerald undertook to speak to Minister Shatter about this issue.

Maze/Long Kesh Site: Land Disposal

Mr McNarry asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 16539/15-15, to provide details of the land which was disposed of for £10,000.

(AQW 17072/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: A private home owner asked to purchase a small portion of land adjacent to the Maze Long Kesh site to allow continued access to maintain a sewage system.

A business case for the sale was prepared by OFMDFM and approved by DFP. Land and Property Services valued the tract of land (0.12 acres) at £10,000, the price at which it was sold.

The transfer/sale of the land will not impact on or constrain the future development of the site and the land transfer will rationalise the site boundary.

Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry: Counsel

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline the process followed in selecting and appointing counsel to the Historical Abuse Inquiry.

(AQW 17251/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry is independent from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, so we cannot answer questions on its behalf. This is a matter for the Chairman of the Inquiry.

DARD: Central Investigation Unit

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether they have employed the service of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Central Investigation Unit in the last five years.

(AQW 17253/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department has had a Service Level Agreement in place with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Central Investigation Service since August 2010 for the provision of services as and when required.

Crumlin Road Gaol

Mr Boylan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the regeneration of the Crumlin Road Gaol. (AQO 2964/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Executive has invested some £10 million in restoration, repair and conservation works at Crumlin Road Gaol to date. Many positive milestones have been achieved and the potential regeneration benefits for the site, not only in North Belfast but on a regional basis, are significant.

A company has been appointed as the Operator to run the visitor attraction and conference centre at the Gaol and they commenced business on 19th November. This new enterprise will create up to 40 jobs and attract an estimated 90,000 visitors per year. A further phase of regeneration is about to commence in A Wing of the Gaol, with the support of considerable private sector investment. The agreed proposal will create up to 60 jobs and potentially attract over 40,000 visitors in the first year, rising to 100,000 by year 3.

Restoration work is also beginning on the Warders' Cottages at the Gaol which will lead to a suitable commercial or other use for the cottages.

Discussion around other parts of the site are also ongoing; a digital/creative industries hub and museum are among some of the ideas being considered for Wings B and D.

Public Appointments

Mr Elliott asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what action they are taking to improve adherence to the public appointments processes. (AQO 2970/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Each Executive Minister is solely responsible for appointments to the public bodies sponsored by their respective Departments.

These appointments should be made in accordance with public appointment policy and, where applicable, the Code of Practice published by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments.

Both public appointment policy and the Commissioner's Code of Practice are governed by the overarching principle of selection on merit.

The Commissioner has a statutory responsibility to audit departmental public appointment processes to establish whether his Code of Practice is being observed. The Commissioner publishes his findings in the form of audit reports.

A cross departmental working group of officials is looking at the issue of compliance with the Commissioner's Code of Practice.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

DARD Headquarters

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development who were the key people who made the decision on the location for her Department's new headquarters. (AQW 15730/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): I made the decision on the location of my Department's new Headquarters.

DARD Headquarters

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the business case for the site in Ballykelly can be an effective way of determining the optimum location for her Department's new headquarters, given that the site in Ballykelly has already been chosen. (AQW 15732/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Having reached my decision on location, I have now directed my officials to prepare a Business Case that considers only those options that would deliver the Headquarters on the Ballykelly site. The Business Case will have as its starting point those options which address the NI Executive's policy objective.

Departmental Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of funding provided for (i) Agri-Food and Bio-sciences Institute, Hillsborough; (ii) Cafre Colleges at (a) Greenmount; (b) Loughry; and (c) Enniskillen; (iii) Cafre Advisory Service; (iv) Laboratory Services at (a) Stormont; and (b) Omagh; and (v) Veterinary Offices, in each of the last three years. (AQW 16488/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Within DARD's budgetary and in-year monitoring processes, funds are allocated to categories of expenditure. With the exception of CAFRE Colleges, the information requested is not available as the funding is not allocated by the various locations and services as requested. Table 1 below sets out details of the apportionment for the CAFRE College sites.

Table 1. CAFRE Colleges. Funding Allocated to Colleges

	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
Greenmount College	15.9	14.0	14.1
Loughry College	5.5	5.6	4.6
Enniskillen College	3.5	2.7	2.9

I can confirm funding allocated to the remaining business areas are as follows:

Table 2.

	2009/10 £m	2010/11 £m	2011/12 £m
AFBI	44.1	47.9	42.5
*Veterinary Offices' Service	9.1	8.7	8.5
*CAFRE Advisory Service	1.4	1.4	1.4

* Staff Salaries only.

Caravan Parks: Forest Service Investment

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any facilities in South Down will benefit from the recently announced £4 million investment by Forest Service on upgrading caravan parks.

(AQW 16846/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has secured £4m under the Jobs & Economy Initiative to help with the development of recreation & tourism projects, including caravan sites, in forests over the next two business years. This presents a significant opportunity for strategic partners, including Councils, to take forward proposals they may have to up-grade visitor provision in forests in their area.

A Memorandum of Understanding is already in place between my Department and Down District Council for the development of recreation and leisure products in forests within the Council area. I believe this provides an excellent framework and opportunity for projects such as up-grading and management of our caravan parks to be taken forward within the time frame of this Fund.

As partners will be required to secure any necessary approvals and demonstrate that projects represent good value for public money it is important to begin to work through the necessary processes as early as possible.

Agrifood Research Fund

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Agri-Food Research Fund can be of benefit to applicants and local people in the South Down area.

(AQW 16924/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognize the importance of research in helping us achieve our strategic goals and objectives. DARD has a long history of funding and carrying out research within the areas of agriculture, fisheries, forestry and food. Much of our sponsored research has been translated into practical applications on farm, food processing and other rural businesses.

The Research Challenge Fund (RCF) is open to Small to Medium Enterprises, Large Enterprises and levy bodies in the North of Ireland. The RCF gives small and medium sized businesses from the agri-food and other rural sectors an opportunity to obtain financial assistance with research. It aims to encourage industry-led consortia to get involved in research projects, by providing grants of up to 50% towards research funding.

To date we have awarded eleven grants, five of which are led by levy bodies. The levy body led projects benefit all local dairy, beef, sheep and pig farmers including those in South Down. Details of all projects can be found on the DARD website.

The next tranche of the Fund (worth £1,000,000) is currently open for applications until 18th January 2013.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the sites that have been confirmed as containing the ash dieback disease in the South Down area; (ii) what actions her Department is taking in South Down to tackle the disease; and (iii) what local people can do to limit the spread of the disease.

(AQW 16926/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) The current outbreaks at recently planted sites have all been identified as part of a separate trace forward survey associated with an imported consignment of ash saplings. Two of these are in Co Down in the Rathfriland area.
- (ii) Destruction notices were served at both sites and with Forest Service assistance affected ash saplings and associated plant debris have been destroyed. A 3km diameter surveillance zone will be established around each outbreak site and we are considering how surveillance will be taken forward in light of our wider survey work for the disease.

As a priority, the Department is currently conducting specific surveys of ash across the north for any symptoms of the disease. We are adopting a risk based approach with the initial focus of surveillance on ash planted within the last 5 years in public & private woodland. The survey will also include roadside plantings; ash planted in the last 5 years under Agri-environment schemes; established trees & hedgerows and ongoing nursery surveillance. To date 222 sites have been surveyed.

Where suspect symptoms of the disease are observed a Statutory Plant Health Notice is issued preventing movement of plants from the site; imposing biosecurity measures; and prohibiting further planting of ash at the site. On confirmation/suspicion of the disease a further Statutory Plant Health Notice requiring destruction of ash plants and associated plant debris will be issued. I am making Forest Service assistance available to landowners to ensure we implement destruction notices swiftly and minimise risk of spread from these sites.

I introduced emergency legislation on 26 October, in tandem with similar legislation in the south. This legislation introduces controls on the movement of plants for planting. In response to stakeholder concerns and the potential for untreated ash wood being a possible pathway for the disease to enter Ireland, along with the south I introduced further legislation on 6 November introducing controls on the movement of wood and bark.

I want to take this opportunity to remind owners of ash who suspect the presence of the plant disease that you are required under the Plant Health Order to notify the Department. However, I encourage everyone to be vigilant for the signs of this disease and report findings. People can help avoid the introduction and spread of plant diseases by practising good plant hygiene and biosecurity. Further information on the disease and reporting findings is available on the Department's website at the following link <http://www.dardni.gov.uk/information-on-ash-dieback>

TB Biosecurity Study

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is preventing her from publishing the findings of the TB Biosecurity Study; and when it will be published.

(AQW 16933/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: DARD commissioned the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) to carry out the TB Biosecurity Study in 2010.

The TB Biosecurity Study has been a large and complex epidemiological study, which has involved the assessment and analysis of a range of possible cattle and wildlife related factors.

Although the field work element of the Study was completed in July 2011 the analysis and writing-up phases of the study were delayed by a number of AFBI staff changes involving key project staff and lead in time for a replacement Veterinary Epidemiologist to undertake the necessary analysis. This post has since been filled and AFBI hopes to be able to share the salient findings from their draft project report with DARD early in the New Year. The report will require an element of peer review before publication by AFBI, particularly prior to publication in any scientific journals.

DARD officials will wish to consider the content of this report and discuss its findings with AFBI. It is anticipated that the TB Biosecurity Study report will be published in 2013.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to what extent departmental officials have expanded the area of surveillance for ash dieback disease in the five locations where it has been detected.

(AQW 16942/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There are now currently 11 outbreaks at recently planted premises. All have been identified as part of a trace forward survey associated with an imported consignment of ash saplings. A 3km diameter surveillance zone will be established around each outbreak site and we are considering how surveillance will be taken forward in light of our wider survey work for the disease.

As a priority, the Department is currently conducting specific surveys of ash across the north for any symptoms of the disease. We are adopting a risk based approach with the initial focus of surveillance on ash planted within the last 5 years

in public & private woodland. The survey will also include roadside plantings; ash planted in the last 5 years under Agri-environment schemes; established trees & hedgerows and ongoing nursery surveillance. Any suspect trees found will be sampled and undergo laboratory testing for the Ash die-back pathogen. To date 222 sites have been surveyed.

Chalara Fraxinea

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the status of the spread of chalara fraxinea in ash trees; and how many ash trees have been destroyed to date.

(AQW 16958/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As of 27 November 2012 we have 11 outbreaks and to date 5,100 saplings have been destroyed.

Union Flag: Dundonald House, Stormont

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Union Flag was not flown from Dundonald House, Stormont, on 20 November 2012.

(AQW 17055/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: A minor fault arose with the mechanism supporting the flag on that day and steps are being taken to rectify this to ensure the flag is flown appropriately on the dates stipulated in the legislation.

Animal Cruelty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 16214/11-15, how dog breeding establishments and dog charities can be kept informed of any register of people convicted of animal cruelty, considering the contact the establishments and charities have with the public.

(AQW 17076/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Public access to any database or register of animal welfare offenders raises significant legal issues particularly on the implications for human rights and data protection legislation. Such matters would have to be considered in great detail before any decision could be made.

I recently met with the DOJ Minister and agreed that in the New Year, my officials will be engaging with the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the Councils to discuss issues including access to information relating to animal welfare court cases and the sharing of such information amongst enforcement bodies.

Rural Development Programme

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) how many strategic projects are being assessed through the Rural Development Programme, including the location and application details, broken down by arm's-length body; and (ii) the rationale for each project being defined as strategic.

(AQW 17077/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In relation to (i) I have attached a list of the 37 applications (annex A) that have been assessed through Local Action Group assessment panels and have scored the pass mark of 65 or more with the details you requested.

At (ii) for each project to be defined as strategic, it must meet a set of defined criteria, and these were published in the press advertisements for calls for applications. I attach at Annex b, a sample of the press advertisement which outlines the eligibility criteria. Additionally each project must have a full green book economic appraisal completed, which assesses amongst other issues, the need for the project, additionality, and displacement.

Annex A

Group	Measure	Applicant	Project	Amount
ARC	3.4	Tyrone GAA Committee (CLG Thir Eoghin)	Garvaghey 3G Multi-activity Pitch	£594,656
ARC	3.4	Loughmacrory Community Development Association (LCDA)	Loughmacrory Regional Outdoor Activity Centre (jetty, boats, running track, indoor gym, coffee shop)	£839,173
ARC	3.4	Greencastle St. Patricks GFC	Greencastle CORE (Community Outdoor Recreational Enterprise) Project MUGA and outdoor gym	£380,871
ARC	3.4	Bready Multisports Club	Recreational 3G surface with floodlighting and renewable energy source	£647,337
ARC	3.4	Greysteel Community Enterprises	Soccer 3G Pitch	£537,540

Group	Measure	Applicant	Project	Amount
ARC	3.4	Derry County Committee	4 G Multi-use Recreational and Community Surface	£765,595
ARC	3.4	Leckpatrick Development Association	New Community Hall including meeting room, gym	£752,662
ARC	3.4	St Mary's GAC Banagher	Building a multi-use hall / Community facility in Feeny and gym, equipment	£987,497
ARC	3.6	Sion Mills Building Preservation Trust	Sion Mills Stables Heritage education facility; meeting rooms & computer suite	£274,531
DRAP	3.4	Banbridge District Council	Rathfriland 3G Sports Pitch	£583,963
DRAP	3.3	Ards Borough Council (Tourism Section)	Ards BC Mourne and Coastal Route. Implementation of capital works to brand a series of car parks in Ards Borough which fall along the NI Tourist Boards Mourne Coastal Route Scenic drive.	£454,652
DRAP	3.3	Down District Council	Mourne Coastal Route - Amenity Sites Enhancement Programme - Phase III (Down District). Project focuses on the development and enhancement of 8 Down District based strategic amenity sites (phase 3) which are located along the Mourne Coastal Route will like Newry to Belfast and then onto the Casueway Coastal Route completing a comprehensive route around the coast of NI	£430,972
DRAP	3.3	North Down Borough Council - D Howard	Upgrade and improvements to the North Down Coastal Path at Seahill, and between Seapark to Cultra	£350,579
DRAP	3.3	Down District Council	Downpatrick & Co. Down Railway extension and associated road transport services	£995,000
GROW	3.6	Railway Preservation Society of Ireland	Carriage Workshop, Locomotive Workshop, Interpretation panels, Site Works (Buker, concrete surfaces, ash pit, landscaping, seating and play area)	£798,000
GROW	3.4	Toomebridge Initiative Group - TIG	Building of Toome Community and Sports Centre	£999,999
LRP	3.3	Castlereagh Borough Council	Lock Keepers cottage and barge. Provide additional toilets and sinage plus purchase and restoration of an original barge to be used as a museum on-site	£606,308
LRP	3.4	Lisburn City Council	Strategic adventure play programme to provide state-of-the-art modern play equipment to 14 rural playparks	£821,667

Group	Measure	Applicant	Project	Amount
LRP	3.6	Lisburn City Council	Moirá Demesne Cultural heritage project. Creating a 3G MUGA, pavillion, upgrade to walks/paths, upgrade to entrance, sinage	£999,999
NER	3.3	Ballymoney Council	Provide camping pods and wet room facilities at the Drumaheglis Marina	£471,750
NER	3.3	Larne Council	Stainless Steel staircase linking The Gobbins Cliff Path to The Gobbins Sea path	£500,000
NER	3.3	Moyle Council	Facilities including pontoons/ toilets/camping pods at locations along the coast. Stop off points for kayak along the coast	£352,000
NER	3.4	Ballymena Council	To provide 3 MUGA pitches in three rural villages	£680,000
NER	3.3	Coleraine Council	Upgrade to coastal paths, provision of boardwalks/ interpretative sinage at P'Ballintrae, C'Rock and White Rocks	£999,999
SOAR	3.4	Culloville Development Association	Culloville Community Resource Centre	£934,442
SOAR	3.5	Newry & Mourne District Council	Extension to Crossmaglen Community Centre	£382,500
SOAR	3.4	Armagh City & District Council	Tandragee Amenity Initiative	£357,000
SOAR	3.4	MIS application (Ballyholland Development Association)	Community facility Ballyholland	£772,718
SWARD	3.4	Irvinestown Trustee Enterprise LTD	ARC ITEC health and care village - new building	£635,800
SWARD	3.4	Cookstown District Council	Physical activity arena - indoor arena for sporting activity	£790,389
SWARD	3.4	Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council	Rural recreation and healthy living hub 4 small sided games areas	£484,787
SWARD	3.3	Outdoor Recreation NI	Blessingbourne Trailes project	£392,721
SWARD	3.4	Galbally Youth & Community Association	Centre of Rural Excellence - extension to existing hall and internal; renovation	£515,796
SWARD	3.4	Derrytresk Community Organisation	Community resource centre - new build	£728,237
SWARD	3.4	Fermanagh District Council	3G MUGA Pitch	£631,983
SWARD	3.4	Ballinamallard FC	Ballingnamallard community recreation hub - 3G pitch	£283,509
SWARD	3.4	Fermanagh District Council	Building of 3 x 3 MUGAs	£488,169
				£23,222,801

Annex B

Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme

_____ is the delivery Agent for Axis 3 of the Northern Ireland Rural development Programme (NIRDP) 2007-2013 – Rural Life. The partnership delivers funding for projects in eligible rural areas within the _____, _____, and _____ council areas.

Applications For Strategic Projects

We are open for applications for strategic projects which are commensurate with the objectives of xxxxx's rural development Strategy. You should note that this is a competitive process with limited funding available. The measures under which applications are being sought are:

- 3.3 Encouragement of Tourism Activities
- 3.4 Basic Services for the Economy and Rural Population
- 3.5 Village Renewal and Development
- 3.6 Conservation and Upgrading of the Rural Heritage.

Applications must be submitted on-line via the EU grants database and any supporting documentation in hard copy to xxxxxxxxxxxxxx on or before 12.00 noon on _____.

Eligibility Criteria

In addition to the general eligibility rules of the scheme only those applications meeting the following evidence based criteria at the close of the call will be admitted as eligible for consideration:

- 1 Local authorities, NGO's and the community sector including social economy enterprises will be eligible to apply for strategic projects.
- 2 Planning Permission (and other Statutory Requirements) applied for or already in place;
- 3 The proposed start date is no later than 1st April 2013;
- 4 The planned end date is no later than 31st December 2014;
- 5 The project grant requirement is above £250k but less than £1m;
- 6 The Project must be Capital or Infrastructure;
- 7 The Project Promoter/s matched funding must be at least 15%;
- 8 Robust project delivery costings must be in place at application stage;
- 9 A full business case or a recent (within last 12 months) independent Economic Appraisal to 'Green Book' standard must be in place*; and
- 10 All applications must have consulted the appropriate Local Council as a key informant.

* If only submitting a business case and project deemed eligible the applicant must submit a full independent economic appraisal to 'Green Book' standard before the 31st July 2012.

To find out more about the call or to discuss your strategic proposal in more detail, contact _____ at tel: _____ or email: _____.

The NIRDP 2007-2013 is part funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural development (EAFRD) and is managed by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Less-favoured Areas

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the impact that the reclassification of Less Favoured Areas will have on future dual use claims.

(AQW 17143/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There is no direct link between the EU Commission's proposed designation of Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) and the future of dual use claims. Indirectly, if the area of ANC were to be larger or smaller than the current LFA, then the number of dual use claims could similarly be larger or smaller. However, the designation of ANCs forms part of the much broader CAP reform proposals. There are aspects of these proposals which could have a significant bearing on the existence or extent of future dual use claims. For example, if future Pillar I CAP support was to be confined to active farmers (a term that has yet to be defined), this could potentially reduce significantly the number of dual use claims. These issues will become clearer only when the CAP reform agreement is agreed and implementation options decided.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many forests have been affected by Ash Dieback.

(AQW 17154/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: To date, no Forest Service forests have been affected. Ash die-back was confirmed in 14 recently planted private woodlands, one amenity woodland and there were 2 confirmations in trade.

The position is kept updated daily on the Department's website.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how she plans to tackle Ash Dieback. (AQW 17155/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Ash is one of the commonest native species on this island so we must do all we can to minimise the risk of Chalara Dieback of Ash (*Chalara fraxinea*) becoming established here. I introduced emergency legislation on 26 October in tandem with similar in the south on the movement of ash plants and further emergency legislation on 6 November, again in tandem with the south around timber importation. My Department is currently carrying out monitoring of ash plants at nursery and retail premises, and recent amenity and woodland planting sites. Where we find signs of this damaging disease we take samples for laboratory testing for the Ash die-back pathogen. Where our inspectors suspect that the disease is present or there is a risk that it may spread they may order destruction of plants and relevant material.

At this stage we believe the greatest risk is that disease may have been introduced on young plants for planting, and so we focus our surveillance on plants for planting and trees planted within the last 5 years. By 10:00 on 30th November, 222 sites had been surveyed and disease was confirmed on 15 recently planted ash sites and 2 Nursery sites in Counties Antrim, Down, Derry and Tyrone, all linked to plants grown on the continent. Further tracing to other sites is in progress.

Forest Service assistance has been offered to private site owners to ensure the disease is dealt with as swiftly as possible.

Dog Licences

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dog licences are extant in each district council area. (AQW 17191/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. The Councils enforce this legislation and provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

Annual statistics for the 2012 year are not yet available. The table below details the number of dog licences issued in 2011 in each Council area.

	Dogs licences issued in 2011
Antrim	4473
Ards	7717
Armagh	4156
Ballymena	9274
Ballymoney	3367
Banbridge	4238
Belfast	10936
Carrickfergus	2425
Castlereagh	5173
Coleraine	8014
Cookstown	6591
Craigavon	5386
Derry	2871
Down	7047
Dungannon	2650
Fermanagh	5091
Larne	4467
Limavady	2600
Lisburn	9997
Magherafelt	2714

	Dogs licences issued in 2011
Moyle	1972
Newry	4973
Newtownabbey	7194
North Down	6149
Omagh	2344
Strabane	2960
Total	134779

DARD: Discussions with Scottish Counterpart

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what on-going discussions are taking place with the Scottish Office Agriculture, Environment and Fisheries Department to ensure that our farmers and fishermen have similar opportunities to Scottish farmers and fishermen who have reached a strong position in terms of delivering economic prosperity in their region.

(AQW 17232/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has close and regular contact with its Scottish counterpart on a range of important issues including CAP reform, fisheries, animal health and welfare, plant health and research and development. The contacts made are both formal and informal in nature and include face-to-face meetings and teleconferences.

In relation to CAP reform, teleconferences involving officials from all four administrations take place at approximately fortnightly intervals - although bilateral meetings also occur. Similarly, there are weekly teleconferences involving officials from the four Fisheries Administrations (FAs), including Marine Scotland, to agree positions on Common Fisheries Policy matters such as CFP reform, Cod Recovery Plan amendment, and Fishing opportunities.

Meetings of Fisheries Ministers occur at least four times a year and normally in advance of, and during, the major EU Fisheries Councils in November and December. I would similarly meet my Ministerial colleagues on agricultural issues at the EU Council and at the six monthly Ministerial meetings in London.

There is also frequent communication between DARD officials and their Scottish counterparts on animal health and plant health issues and on research and development.

Agrifood Industry: Visit to China

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the benefits to the agri-food industry of her recent trip to China.

(AQW 17234/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My recent trip to Beijing and Shanghai has produced a range of benefits to the industry. Whilst in China, I took every opportunity to highlight the quality of our livestock and agri-food industry on this global stage.

I launched a Joint Research Centre for Meat Science between the Agri-food and Biosciences Institute and the largest Agricultural University in China which is based in Beijing. In addition, I also launched a further Joint Agri-food Research Centre between AFBI and the Shanghai Academy of Agriculture Sciences.

One of our key areas for collaboration is food safety, a key priority for the Chinese 5 year plan. Food security was also mentioned recently by the newly appointed leader of China, Mr Xi Jinping who our First and deputy First Ministers met in Dublin last year. Outcomes of scientific collaboration on food quality, food safety and traceability will provide benefits for the agri-food industry in the north of Ireland and provide a positive platform for ongoing trade negotiations. My officials are currently working with their Chinese counterparts on poultry exports. Certificates are already agreed for the export of pork and I urge our industry to meet and maintain the Chinese conditions as soon as possible so that exports of fifth quarter can begin to mainland China.

I met the Director General of the Shanghai Municipal Agriculture Commission, Mr Sun Lei and his Chief of Trade to highlight the specific issues pertaining to pork exports from the north of Ireland when sourced from the South. China's business culture is considerably different from ours and building strategic relationships at Government to Government level is an important aspect of developing trade opportunities. I will build these strategic alliances over the forthcoming years and am looking forward to meeting Chinese veterinary auditors who will visit the north of Ireland in 2013.

I also agreed a skills-sharing programme for the equine sector between CAFRE's Enniskillen Campus and the Chinese Agriculture University. The equine industry in China is in its infancy and presents exciting opportunities for equine graduates from the north of Ireland in the future. Professor Han from CAU has already visited Enniskillen in 2012 and wishes to develop this relationship by working with me over the forthcoming years.

Agrifood Research Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the Agri-Food Research Fund will be of benefit to applicants and local people in the North Down area.

(AQW 17236/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise the importance of research in helping us achieve our strategic goals and objectives. DARD has a long history of funding and carrying out research within the areas of agriculture, fisheries, forestry and food. Much of our sponsored research has been translated into practical applications on farm, food processing and other rural businesses.

The Research Challenge Fund (RCF) is open to Small to Medium Enterprises, Large Enterprises and levy bodies in the north of Ireland. The RCF gives small and medium sized businesses from the agri-food and other rural sectors an opportunity to obtain financial assistance with research. It aims to encourage industry-led consortia to get involved in research projects, by providing grants of up to 50% towards research funding.

To date we have awarded eleven grants, five of which are led by levy bodies. The levy body led projects benefit all local dairy, beef, sheep and pig farmers including those in North Down. Details of all projects can be found on the DARD website.

The next tranche of the Fund (worth £1,000,000) is currently open for applications until 18th January 2013.

Rural Development Programme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she plans to extend the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 or to develop a new programme for 2014.

(AQW 17301/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The current EU legislation for rural development covers the funding period 2007-2013 although spend for some measures can continue to December 2015. The EU proposals for Rural Development funding for the 2014-2020 period were published on the 12 October 2011.

Once the Commission's proposals are agreed, I will bring forward a draft programme of support for rural development for 2014-2020 considering the policy needs for both agriculture and the wider rural community.

My Department is currently considering the needs of the industry and rural areas based on the proposed EU priorities. Lessons learnt from the current and previous programmes along with examples of best practice will also help to inform programme development for the 2014-2020 period. However the shape and size of the 2014-2020 programme will be very dependent on the rural development budget available.

Finishing Units

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether she has investigated the possibility of establishing approved finishing units.

(AQW 17330/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has from time to time received approaches from both individual herdkeepers and industry representatives in relation to introducing approved finishing units (AFUs) here. My officials were questioned about AFUs in their evidence presentations to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee in relation to its recent Review into Bovine Tuberculosis. An AFU is generally understood to be a specially designated herd facility that finishes cattle, including those from TB restricted herds, prior to movement direct to slaughter and, significantly, that must manage their disease risk in a different way to minimise the risk to other herds.

However, the AFU proposals that have been received from stakeholders to date, if implemented, would increase the disease risk to neighbouring herds. In this context, my Department is aware of a range of expert opinion that views the collection of cattle from TB restricted herds as a system that involves a high risk of spreading bovine TB.

We are aware that arrangements for AFUs in other jurisdictions are subject to inspection and review and we shall be interested to consider the outcome of those exercises.

DARD-owned Land: Tullyhogue, Cookstown

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the plans for the land owned by her Department at Tullyhogue, Cookstown

(AQW 17458/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The land referred to at Tullyhogue, Cookstown has been identified as surplus to DARD requirements. Having considered a range of disposal options I have decided this land is best kept in the public sector due to its proximity to the ancient monument known as Tullaghogue Fort. The NI Environment Agency (NIEA) has the statutory authority for the protection of ancient monuments here and has agreed to a transfer of this land from my department to them via the Department of Environment (DOE).

DARD-owned Land: Tullyhogue, Cookstown

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline any plans for land owned by her Department at Tullyhogue, County Tyrone.

(AQW 17645/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The land referred to at Tullyhogue, Cookstown has been identified as surplus to DARD requirements. Having considered a range of disposal options I have decided this land is best kept in the public sector due to its proximity to the ancient monument known as Tullaghogue Fort. The NI Environment Agency (NIEA) has the statutory authority for the protection of ancient monuments here and has agreed to a transfer of this land from my department to them via the Department of Environment (DOE).

Poultry Litter

Mr Molloy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the next stage in finding a sustainable solution to using poultry litter.

(AQO 3021/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The poultry sector is a key part of our agri-food industry and an important contributor to the local economy. The sector has potential to expand but it is being constrained due to lack of progress in securing a long term solution to utilise poultry litter. In response to this, I commissioned a review of poultry litter management options by my Department and the Agri-food & Biosciences Institute (AFBI) which was published in April this year.

The management and utilisation of poultry litter is a cross cutting issue. Therefore, following publication of the review I, along with the DETI and DOE Ministers, agreed that officials should work together to explore alternative solutions for the sustainable utilisation of poultry litter. This is vital to help meet the requirements of the EU Nitrates and Water Framework Directives and support sustainable development of our agri-food industry.

Having met with a range of stakeholders I believe there are potential options that should be tested. The Minister of Enterprise Trade and Investment and I have agreed to explore the potential for these emerging technologies through the use of a Small Business Research Initiative.

The SBRI will stimulate the development of sustainable and innovative solutions for the utilisation of poultry litter. The SBRI competition will open on 10 December 2012.

I believe that the Competition will help secure long-term solutions for poultry litter management in the north of Ireland. This will be of great benefit to the poultry sector and our wider agri-food sector.

Protected Geographical Indications

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what work her Department is doing to pursue further Protected Geographical Indications for local produce.

(AQO 3025/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Thank you for this opportunity to outline what my Department is doing to pursue further Protected Food Names (PFN) status for local produce. Armagh Bramleys, Comber Earlys and Lough Neagh Eels have already been granted a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). Work is ongoing towards a joint application with the South being submitted for 'Irish Salmon'. While this is a great start, there needs to be a better understanding among food companies of the scheme and how it can be used.

My Department therefore recently hosted a Protected Food Name (PFN) seminar in Greenmount. This was well attended by interested producer groups and key industry representatives and outlined the benefits of a PFN and how it could be used.

Other work my officials have been involved with includes:-

- A mail shot to all local councils, industry and retail groups;
- Links with FoodNI to promote PGI products at local food shows and events. For example, at a FoodNI event in Mount Stewart;
- Participation in an Irish speaking BBC TV show, *Lúí Na Talún* to explain the PFN Scheme;
- Lough Neagh Eels were showcased at an international food trade event in London at the time of the Olympic Games;
- The DARD website has been updated with PFN information and a PFN Information pack distributed across the agri-food sector;
- A DARD-hosted PFN stand at this year's Balmoral Show.

It was rewarding that my Department was chosen as a finalist in the recent CIPR Awards, in recognition of its successful media strategy and coverage.

My officials are currently having a series of key discussions across a wide range of sectors and I hope that from this ongoing work, building on the three recent PGI awards, we will see further successful applications for local produce.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department is proposing to process and implement the current phase of the Countryside Management Scheme.

(AQO 3028/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department continues to deliver a number of agri-environment schemes, including the Countryside Management Scheme. These are funded to the tune of £180 million under the current Rural Development Programme. There are over 12,000 farmers participating in these schemes who manage some 450,000 ha of land which represents 44% of the agricultural area. These schemes aim to bring environmental benefit to our countryside, however they also make a significant contribution to the rural economy, with approximately £25m being paid to agri-environment farmers each year.

Within the last twelve months, my Department has progressed new applications to the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS), giving priority to those which have the highest environmental value. Some 549 new agreements were signed this year and a further 200 high priority applications which offer the greatest environmental benefit are currently being processed and will be offered agreements with a start date of 1 January 2013. In addition to these new agreements, my Department is focusing on helping existing participants to make the most of their schemes to benefit the countryside. Looking ahead to the next Rural Development Programme, we have started work on the development of a new agri-environment scheme which will aim to sustain and enhance biodiversity and water quality, provide opportunities for woodland creation, and help to mitigate against climate change.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Sport Clubs: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the funding allocated to clubs affiliated to the (i) Gaelic Athletic Association; (ii) Irish Football Association; and (iii) Irish Rugby Football Union since she came into office.

(AQW 16428/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Sport NI has responsibility for the distribution of funding for sport throughout the north of Ireland. Since I came into office in May 2011, Sport NI has allocated a total of £3,235,409 exchequer funding to the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), Irish Football Association (IFA) and Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) for their affiliated clubs and for the benefit of individual athletes, players and their constituent clubs.

A breakdown of this funding allocated since May 2011 is: -

GAA	IFA	IRFU
£1,487,108	£1,221,141	£527,160

No lottery funding has been provided to the IFA, GAA and IRFU during this time.

Equality Impact Assessments: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the cost to her Department, over the last three financial years, of undertaking equality impact assessments.

(AQW 16857/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There were no Equality Impact Assessments (EQIA) completed by my Department in the last three financial years. The consultation and Equality Impact Assessment on the Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language and Strategy for Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture are currently underway. However, costs on the EQIA cannot be readily disaggregated.

Boxing Clubs: Funding

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding (i) the Big Lottery; (ii) her Department; and (iii) any other government source has allocated to each boxing club, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17010/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department, nor Sport NI, has responsibility for the funds distributed by the Big Lottery Fund as it is an independent Lottery distributor. I am, therefore, unable to provide you with any details of the funding it has allocated to boxing clubs.

Over the past 5 financial years to 31 March 2012, Sport NI, which has responsibility for funding for sport in the north of Ireland, has provided exchequer funding totalling £310,241 to 20 boxing clubs. The details are listed in Table A attached.

Information received from other Government Departments has indicated that a further £12,094 was provided to 5 boxing clubs during the same timeframe. The details are listed in Table B attached.

Carál Ní Chuilín MLA

Table A – Exchequer funding paid to Boxing Clubs in each of the last 5 years up to 31 March 2012 *

Organisation Name	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	Grand Total
All Saints Amateur Boxing Club		£8,000		£8,000
Banbridge Amateur Boxing Club	£7,394	£1,964		£9,358
Cairn Lodge Amateur Boxing Club	£2,374			£2,374
Canal Amateur Boxing Academy		£21,366	£2,299	£23,665
Castlereagh Amateur Boxing Club		£19,926		£19,926
Derrylin Boxing Club		£8,959	£6,000	£14,959
Eastside ABC			£30,000	£30,000
Gleann Amateur Boxing Club		£16,722		£16,722
Holy Family Boxing Club		£24,344		£24,344
Holy Trinity Youth Club		£24,322		£24,322
Immaculata Amateur Boxing Club		£29,395		£29,395
Ligoniel Amateur Boxing Club	£3,000	£28,826		£31,826
Lurgan Amateur Boxing Club	£7,727	£1,760		£9,487
Monkstown Community Sports Facility and Boxing Gym	£10,000			
Poleglass Amateur Boxing Club		£4,245		£4,245
Saints Amateur Boxing Club			£4,980	£4,980
Silverbridge Boxing Club		£1,700		£1,700
St Brigid's Cross Community Boxing Club			£2,024	£2,024
St John Bosco Amateur Boxing Club			£3,800	£3,800
St Paul's Amateur Boxing Club	£9,540	£29,574		£39,114
Grand Total	£40,035	£221,103	£49,103	£310,241

Please note:

* No exchequer funding was paid to boxing clubs during the financial years 07/08 and 08/09

Table B – Funding to boxing clubs from other Government Departments in each of the last 5 years up to 31 March 2012

Government Department	Organisation Name	2010/11	2011/12	Grand Total
Department of Education	Golden Gloves Boxing Club, Coleraine		£1,900	£4,134
Total		0	£1,900	£4,134
Department of Justice	East Down		£1,000	£1,000
	Errigal	£400		£400
	Immaculata		£5,060	£5,060
	Skerries		£1,500	£1,500
Total		£400	£7,560	£7,960

Please note:

* No funding from other Government sources was paid to boxing clubs during the financial years 07/08; 08/09 and 09/10.

Sign Language: Interpreters

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether, under the NI Training Project, the number of qualified sign language interpreters increased from 11 in 2008 to 18 in 2011.

(AQW 17020/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The NI Training Project received funding from my Department through the Association of Sign Language Interpreters (NI). As a consequence of this funding, three additional interpreters have now qualified bringing the total number of registered sign language interpreters in the north of Ireland to 16.

Arts: Expenditure

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how her expenditure on the arts compares with other parts of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17032/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no universally accepted model for comparing expenditure solely on the arts with other jurisdictions. This is because of the differing definitions for the arts in the various jurisdictions and also differing local needs.

Ulster Orchestra

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many current members of the Ulster Orchestra have come through the ranks of the Youth Orchestra; and how many of them are based locally.

(AQW 17039/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Membership of the Ulster Youth Orchestra does not mean graduation to the Ulster Orchestra. As a professional orchestra, it has open recruitment for job vacancies and all recruitment is conducted under the legislative requirement of the employment laws of the North of Ireland.

The Arts Council has advised that as far as they are aware none of the current contracted members of the Ulster Orchestra have come through the ranks of the Youth Orchestra but they cannot be definitive, without contacting all the members.

All of the current members of the Ulster Orchestra are based locally.

Irish Language: Promotion

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what is being done to promote the Irish language at European or international level.

(AQW 17066/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Foras na Gaeilge which is jointly funded by my Department and the Department for Arts Heritage and Gaeltacht is involved in a number of initiatives and projects which promotes the Irish language at European and international level. These include:-

- An Coiste Téarmaíochta (The Terminology Committee) which provides terminology to IATE (InterActive Terminology for Europe).
- Working directly with accredited translators/editors who work in the EU.
- Working with institutions throughout Europe such as the Network for promoting Linguistic Diversity (NPLD); The International European Conference of Lexicography (Euralex) and the European Federation of National Institutions for Language (EFNIL).
- Collaborating with institutions such as the Goethe Institute, Cervantes Institute, Alliance Francaise and with embassies in order to facilitate Irish language poetry readings, lectures, exhibitions.
- Funding organisations and groups such as -
 - Gaelchultúr– courses provided on line/publications /distributed internationally
 - Aistear – online specialised training for translators/editors
 - Drama Companies which have toured internationally include - Branar (Scandinavia), Mouth on Fire (Japan, France), Fíbin (Africa, Europe), Axis (USA, Poland), Aisling Ghéar (USA.)
 - Clar na Leabhar Gaeilge supports publishing in Irish – international market
 - Áis distributes books internationally
 - Translation of Irish literature into many world languages – French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, Norwegian, Danish, Arabic, Japanese, Hindi, Hungarian, Estonian.

My Department is also responsible for monitoring the Executive's compliance with the European Charter for Indigenous and Minority Languages. The Charter describes its purpose as cultural and it aims to protect and promote regional or minority languages rather than linguistic minorities.

Illegal Netting

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for illegal netting in Lough Neagh in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17137/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The following table details the number of people (i) prosecuted and (ii) convicted of offences relating to netting in Lough Neagh in each of the last five years for which records are complete

Year	Number of people prosecuted	Number of people convicted
2007	2	2
2008	2	2
2009	6	6
2010	9	9
2011	4	4

Líofa: Primary Schools

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether financial assistance is available through her Department for primary schools to develop Liofá initiatives and encourage the development of the Irish language (i) inside; and (ii) outside the classroom.

(AQW 17144/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department does not provide financial assistance to primary schools to develop Líofa initiatives. The Department's Líofa Officer does liaise with schools to promote the Irish Language by the delivery of Líofa presentations making schools more aware of the Líofa initiative and offering taster Irish Language sessions on request.

C S Lewis: Fiftieth Anniversary of Death

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her plans to mark the 50th anniversary of the passing of C.S Lewis and the erection of a plaque in his honour at Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

(AQW 17271/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: To commemorate the 50th anniversary of C.S Lewis's death on 22 November 2013, Libraries NI is organising a programme of events including exhibitions, talks, readings and workshops. These will be centred around Holywood Arches library and Belfast Central library both of which are close to the areas in which CS Lewis lived and worked. The Linen Hall library will also mark the anniversary with a series of events.

The Arts Council NI, which administers funding for cultural events, is likely to receive applications for funding for a range of events in the next financial year.

Language Strategies: Consultation

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many responses were received on the Irish Language, Ulster-Scots Language, Heritage and Culture Strategy consultation.

(AQO 3032/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I launched separate public consultations on both draft strategies on 11 July 2012. The closing date was 27 November 2012.

My Department received 280 consultation responses to the Strategy for Protecting and Enhancing the Development of the Irish Language and 130 consultation responses to the Strategy for Ulster Scots Language, Heritage and Culture.

Several requests for an extension were received before the consultation closed. These consultation responses will be received by 11 December 2012.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who responded to both consultations. Your responses will help to improve and strengthen both draft strategies.

I am committed to bringing these strategies forward in line with the NI Act 1998 which places duties on the Executive to adopt both strategies.

Boxing Clubs: Funding

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when a boxing club, if successful in an application for funding, can expect to receive the funding.

(AQO 3039/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Boxing Investment Programme will be rolled out over the period 2012-2015. It is currently proposed that the first tranche of funding to supply boxing equipment to individual clubs will be made available before the end of this financial year.

Sport NI is currently working with the Irish Amateur Boxing Association (IABA) and the Central Procurement Directorate of the Department of Finance and Personnel to ensure this equipment is procured and ready to be released to clubs once the public consultation is completed.

Tranches 2 and 3 of the funding will deal with premises repairs and major building works. It is proposed that final letters of offer for these tranches will be issued to successful clubs during 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 respectively.

Arts: Community Relations

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how good community relations are promoted through the arts. (AQO 3040/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department, through its Arms Length Bodies, supports a number of arts initiatives that promote good community relations by removing barriers between communities and diminishing segregation through education.

Through its Intercultural Arts Strategy the Arts Council uses the arts to encourage people to form positive contacts, across and within culturally diverse communities. The draft Community Arts Strategy will build on this by bringing together people from all backgrounds to work with professional artists in experiencing and taking part in artistic and creative projects.

The "Building Peace through the Arts, Re-Imaging Communities" programme is another excellent example of promoting good community relations, as it will continue the work of the Reimaging Communities Programme in removing signs of sectarianism and intercommunity segregation and replacing them with imagery that reflects the community in a more positive manner.

Furthermore, the suite of community based projects included in the City of Culture Cultural Programme is designed to use the arts as a means to bring step changes in equality, good relations and social cohesion. Projects like Portrait of a City and Spotlight on Communities bring communities together to understand their past and create a new future for Derry as a creative and cultural hub.

Fishing: Lough Erne

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for her assessment of the viability of the fisheries on Lough Erne. (AQO 3041/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: DCAL is the owner of the fishing rights to Lough Erne and the management of fish stocks is informed by scientific analysis of fish stock surveys.

DCAL policy is that Lough Erne is managed primarily as a recreational fishery, with the traditional activities of commercial fishermen respected, but controlled by licences and permits.

The recreational fishery continues to be of importance and attracts significant numbers of coarse and game anglers to the area.

The commercial eel fishery on Lough Erne was closed in 2010 in compliance with the EU Eel Management Plan.

It has been established that bream stocks in Lough Erne are at an all time low and there will be no commercial fishing for bream from 1 December 2012.

Roach and perch in Lough Erne make up 90% of the survey gillnet catches with perch the dominant species in terms of numbers.

Commercial fishermen have proposed the establishment of a commercial perch fishery. My Department will work in undertaking trials in the first instance.

Olympic and Paralympic Games: Local Athletes

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether she will establish a joint recognition for local athletes who competed for Great Britain or Ireland at the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. (AQO 3042/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already jointly recognised local athletes who competed and attained medal success for Team GB and Team Ireland by hosting a reception in their honour in Parliament Buildings on 13 September 2012. Invited guests included all athletes from the north who competed for Team GB and NI or Team Ireland, their coaches, specialist performance managers, governing bodies of sport and past Olympic and Paralympic medallists.

I will also be hosting a public celebratory event early next year in recognition of all our local athletes, who achieved national or international success during 2012. This would include all local athletes who competed at the London 2012 Games whether that be for Team GB or Team Ireland.

Department of Education

Sure Start: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how he will ensure that the community in North Down is involved in making the Sure Start programme a success.

(AQW 16470/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): Sure Start programmes are specifically designed to reflect and respond to the needs of the local community. The management committee for the new Sure Start programme in North Down is developing proposals to deliver the most appropriate range of services and build on a partnership that is representative of the local community.

Departmental Budget

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether any of his Department's budget has been pooled with those of other Departments, or with agencies outside the remit of his Department; and if so, to provide details.

(AQW 16525/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: None of my Department's budget is pooled with other Departments or Agencies. However there are some areas where the overall policy direction may rest with one Department e.g. the policy direction for the Child Care Strategy rests with the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. This policy is being developed on a cross-departmental basis, funding is available from the Child Care Fund and departments bid to the fund as appropriate.

In addition, there are a number of inter-departmental initiatives where there is one lead Department who will be responsible for delivering the initiative but other Departments may contribute funding. One such area would be funding for Special Olympics Ulster where the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure is the lead Department for this project but a total of 5 departments, including Education, contribute to the overall costs.

Schools: Parent Reading Classes

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how many schools offer reading classes for parents; and how many parents are enrolled in the classes.

(AQW 16634/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is vital that parents take an interest in their child's education. Local and international research has demonstrated that parental involvement from an early age can make a significant difference to a child's life at school and beyond. That is why I launched the advertising campaign 'Education Works' in September which is aimed at raising the value, we, as a society, place on education.

The campaign is focused primarily on the support parents and communities can provide to their children in the home environment and outside of school. Nevertheless, programmes where individual schools invite parents into the school to assist their children and/or other pupils with their reading and which impact positively on pupils' literacy skills, are to be welcomed.

Such programmes are a matter for individual schools and my Department does not hold the information you have requested.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to outline his position on the completion of Northern Ireland Numeracy and Literacy Assessments.

(AQW 16659/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I wrote to schools on 12 November to advise them that, following extensive work by all parties involved in the process, I am satisfied that solutions are in place to address the main technical difficulties encountered by schools and that any that remain can be managed with the appropriate support.

The effective use of computer based assessments is a key element of my literacy and numeracy strategy and it is therefore important that schools participate and provide feedback to ensure that assessments are refined and evolve to suit the needs of our pupils.

For these reasons I have advised schools that I expect them to continue with the assessments before the end of term and use the outcomes to engage with parents and inform teaching and learning for the coming year.

How schools choose to report to parents over the course of the term and whatever format or form of words that they wish to use will be entirely for them to decide. In the first year of operation, NINA and NILA will generate qualitative information only in the first term, so how this is presented and contextualised to parents is a matter for principals and teachers.

Where parent meetings have taken place or are about to take place, it is not expected that they are rescheduled or the assessments completed in advance, unless this is convenient for the school. Schools should run the assessments at a suitable point over the course of the rest of the term and communicate the qualitative outcomes. Parents should be advised

that if they wish to discuss these outcomes further, the school will endeavour to make arrangements to do so as soon as possible, though this may not be practically possible before the end of the current term. Neither DE nor CCEA will be monitoring these arrangements and it will be for schools themselves to assure that they are compliant.

CCEA has begun to contact schools who have yet to start their assessments to ensure that they are able to make progress and report outcomes to parents as planned. Schools which started the assessments but felt unable to continue earlier in the term have been advised to now put arrangements in place to allow their pupils' assessments to proceed and CCEA is in the process of contacting the schools which registered technical difficulties this term to facilitate this.

I recognise, however, that for a small number of these schools, rescheduling the assessments may present particular difficulties and in such instances, individual schools should contact my Department.

School Governors

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to outline the proposed changes for the (i) recruitment; and (ii) removal of school governors.

(AQW 16763/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) Clause 39 of the Education Bill, which is presently before the Assembly, provides for the transfer of responsibility for DE and ELB school governor appointments to the new Education and Skills Authority (ESA). This will require the introduction and application of a common set of procedures for the recruitment and reconstitution of school Boards of Governors. These procedures are currently under consideration.
- (ii) Article 23 of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 2003 provides for regulations to be introduced to enable whole Board of Governors, or a member of the Board of Governors of a grant-aided school, to be removed from office and replaced in specified circumstances. These regulations have not yet been made but that gap is now being addressed. The purpose of the regulations will be to enable the Department, and bodies that nominate and appoint school governors, to take action to safeguard pupils when there are specific concerns about the quality of a school's governance arrangements. Such situations are expected to be extremely rare. More detailed information will be provided to the Assembly Education Committee before the start of the normal public consultation process and Assembly Committee scrutiny process on the draft regulations.

Schools: Maintenance Budget

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the adequacy of the maintenance budget for the Schools Estate for each year of the remainder of the budgetary period.

(AQW 16764/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The need for maintenance works across the schools estate is well documented. I have made certain that monies for maintenance have been ring fenced to ensure that the significant backlog is tackled effectively.

In 2012/13 financial year some £39.444m has been allocated for maintenance across the schools estate. The maintenance baseline in both 2013/14 and 2014/15 is £27m and the Executive recently agreed a further allocation of £10m in 2013/14 giving a total of £37m in that year.

Early Years Strategy

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to explain the reason for the delay in publishing the final Early Years Strategy.

(AQW 16765/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In my statement to the Assembly on the 2 July 2012 I said I would bring forward revised proposals by November; since then work has progressed and my officials have been engaging on regular basis with the Early Years Stakeholder Group. I am attending the British Irish Council Meeting in Cardiff on the 26th of November where a key agenda item is Early Years. I will be making a statement regarding my proposals for early years education and learning shortly after that.

Cross-border Pupil Survey

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the timescale for the proposed actions resulting from the consultation on cross border education.

(AQW 16767/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Actions arising from the cross border survey of pupils will depend upon the outcome of that survey. At present the survey in the North has just concluded while the survey in the South will begin in late November. Minister Quinn (Department for Education and Skills) and I have agreed that officials will make arrangements to analyse the respective survey returns and share anonymised results to ensure presentation to Ministers no later than the first NSMC meeting in 2013.

Dickson Plan

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact that the Catholic Sector moving away from the Dickson Plan will have on the Controlled Sector which has exhibited almost unanimous support for the retention of the presently constituted two-tier system unchanged in its present format.

(AQW 16826/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The focus of the area planning process is on developing a planned network of viable and sustainable schools to provide high quality education to meet the needs of children and young people in an area. Through this process all existing education provision is currently being examined against the Sustainable Schools Policy to determine if it remains fit for purpose, including the provision covered by the Dickson Plan.

In this context, it is the responsibility of the relevant school Managing Authorities to determine the most appropriate structures to meet the needs of the young people and submit these for consideration in the area planning process.

I have made no assessment of the impact on the controlled sector of the Catholic sector moving away from the Dickson plan.

Any significant changes to schools as a result of structures that emerge from the area plans will require the publication of a statutory Development Proposal. It is only when I have firm proposals that I will be in a position to make an assessment of any potential impact on other schools.

In respect of your last point in regards almost unanimous support for the Dickson plan within the controlled sector, perhaps the member could provide me with statistical data to support her assertion.

Until the work on the area plans is complete and the plans are endorsed, I am not in a position to comment further on options for any specific school or on the specifics in the area plans.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to detail the Ministerial directives and policy guidelines which govern (i) the issue of press releases and the giving of interviews by individual members and teams from the Education and Training Inspectorate; and (ii) the professional conduct of individual members and teams from the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 16832/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In relation to (i), there are no policy guidelines or Ministerial directives relating to either the issue of press releases or the giving of interviews by representatives of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI). As with all Departmental press releases, those relating to inspection are issued via the Executive Information Service. Furthermore, I am informed prior to any representative of the ETI undertaking an interview with the media.

In relation to (ii), I do not provide any specific Ministerial directives or policies to govern the professional conduct of inspectors. All inspectors are public servants and are committed to upholding "The Seven Principles of Public Life" which are also referred to as "the Nolan Principles".

The Education and Training Inspectorate has its own set of values, which build on the Nolan Principles: Truth, Dignity, Service and Example, which it applies to all its work.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education to outline the protocols which govern his relationship as Minister with the Education and Training Inspectorate; and to detail the degree of independence from the Minister which the Education and Training Inspectorate has.

(AQW 16864/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) independence relates to the way in which it reports on education and training across the North of Ireland.

It has always been the case that the regulations and legislation under which ETI operates is a matter for the Executive or government at that particular time. ETI works independently from all of the departments for which it provides inspection services. Inspectors inspect without fear or favour and carry out their work without any Ministerial influence.

Dickson Plan

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the year end budgets of post-primary schools in the Dickson Plan catchment area in the last ten years, up to 5 April 2012.

(AQW 16894/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Data for the schools in question is available only from 2005/06 Financial Year onwards, in line with the Southern Education and Library Board's record retention policy. For each post-primary school in the Dickson Plan catchment area, the table below shows the cumulative surplus or (deficit) delegated budget position at year-end (for the Financial Years from 2005/06 to 2011/12) as a financial amount and as a percentage of delegated resources available to each school.

Post-Primary Schools in Dickson Plan Area	2005/06		2006/07		2007/08	
	£	%	£	%	£	%
Clounagh Junior HS	223,637	8.75	176,628	6.60	190,479	7.29
Killicomaine Junior HS	-77,463	-4.67	-26,500	-1.56	22,783	1.31
Lurgan Junior HS	-19,637	-0.90	46,754	2.07	36,073	1.47
Tandragee Junior HS	217,602	19.10	186,967	15.90	137,725	11.76
St Mary's Girls' HS, Lurgan	-59,934	-2.84	71,139	3.21	116,114	5.02
St Paul's Junior HS, Lurgan	208,129	10.73	194,335	9.88	162,272	8.03
Craigavon Senior HS	246,345	8.50	335,090	11.20	333,156	10.40
Lurgan College	66,680	4.00	92,680	5.19	123,894	6.55
Portadown College	79,773	2.60	109,205	3.44	73,178	2.28

Post-Primary Schools in Dickson Plan Area	2008/09		2009/10		2010/11		2011/12	
	£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
Clounagh Junior HS	110,611	4.26	65,852	2.62	98,117	3.83	311,279	11.84
Killicomaine Junior HS	2,471	0.14	-4,699	-0.27	35,703	1.98	34,044	1.84
Lurgan Junior HS	-52,227	-2.10	13,205	0.53	-21,832	-0.87	-7,180	-0.29
Tandragee Junior HS	145,191	11.80	171,647	13.00	202,862	14.91	223,371	15.63
St Mary's Girls' HS, Lurgan	1,380	0.06	-18,265	-0.81	51,114	2.29	-49,918	-2.33
St Paul's Junior HS, Lurgan	172,170	8.24	185,611	8.78	123,399	5.74	141,916	6.93
Craigavon Senior HS	145,178	4.54	68,415	2.21	70,171	2.22	-92,477	-3.17
Lurgan College	107,550	5.36	70,468	3.41	112,833	5.50	157,953	7.44
Portadown College	73,407	2.16	107,966	3.02	27,711	0.77	25,401	0.72

There is one Voluntary Grammar (VG) School (St Michael's Grammar School, Lurgan) within the Dickson Plan catchment area and for which the Department is Funding Authority. VG Schools are not reported on in the same way as Controlled/Maintained schools. The same accounting policies are not used by all VG schools and their cumulative surplus/deficit figures reflect differing levels of non-public funds. This means that the cumulative surplus/deficit figure of a VG school cannot be compared on a like-for-like basis with either another VG school or an ELB school. The Department can however confirm that St Michael's GS, Lurgan did not have a deficit of public funds at any of the year-ends specified in the table above.

Cycling: Sustrans Report

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the Sustrans Going for Gold report on cycling in schools. (AQW 16910/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education is aware of Sustrans Going for Gold Report which focuses on increasing physical activity levels of pupils by seeking integration of cycling into the school curriculum and calling for a range of actions to be to achieve a quarter of children cycling to school regularly.

Our curriculum already supports physical activity amongst children by inclusion of Physical Education (PE) at all key stages of compulsory education. While legislation prevents the Department from prescribing specific amounts of time for any subject within the curriculum, Departmental guidance does recommend that each pupil should be provided with 2 hours of PE per week.

Whilst the Sustrans Going for Gold report seeks to integrate cycling activity within the curriculum, a key focus of the revised curriculum is the flexibility it provides for teachers to adapt their teaching to meet the needs of individual pupils. To complement this flexibility, the Department delegates as much funding and decision-making as possible to schools which are best placed to assess the needs of their pupils. It is very much a matter for schools to reach a judgement on the specifics they teach in the classroom and the resources or programmes that might enhance their teaching and learning. Factors such as the location of the school, the traffic volumes in the local area, the ages of pupils and parents views are all relevant and I would surmise will vary from school to school. Therefore, while I appreciate the recommendations in the Sustrans report, the decision to specifically include walking and cycling to school within their teaching is a matter for each school.

However, I am persuaded of the importance of improving physical activity levels. To this end, the Department of Education facilitated work between the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and DRD to update

DRD's Best Foot Forward resource, a Key Stage 2 teaching tool developed to help teachers bring the advantages of using sustainable modes of transport such as walking, cycling, public transport and car-sharing into the classroom.

This resource is available to all schools via the NI Curriculum website, www.nicurriculum.org.uk which provides advice, guidance and resources to assist teachers in their delivery of the curriculum.

Capital Spend

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16328/11-15, how much finance has been expended (i) to date; and (ii) in the current financial year, in each of the projects listed.

(AQW 16943/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Finances expended against the 18 capital build projects announced in June 2012 (i) to date and (ii) in the current financial year are shown in the table below.

School Scheme	Type of School	All Expenditure up to 31/03/2012 £000's	2012/13 Expenditure up to 31/10/2012 £000's	Total Spend to Date £000's
Coláiste Feirste, Belfast	Post-Primary	2,645	0	2,645
St Clare's Convent Primary School	Primary	739	40	779
St Colman's Abbey Primary School, Newry				
St Joseph's Convent PS, Newry	Primary	93	29	122
Dromore Central Primary School	Primary	244	2	246
Eglinton Primary School	Primary	154	1	155
Tannaghmore Primary School, Lurgan	Primary	209	0	209
Ebrington Controlled PS, Derry	Primary	113	0	113
Foyle & Londonderry College	Post-Primary	15,071	0	15,071
St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan	Primary	144	0	144
Victoria Park Primary School, Belfast	Primary	408	140	548
Enniskillen Model Primary School	Primary	138	3	141
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge	Primary	69	0	69
Bheann Mhadagain, Belfast	Primary	52	0	52
Belmont House Special School, Derry	Special	10	0	10
Rossmar Special School, Limavady	Special	10	0	10
Castletower Ballymena	Special	0	1	1
Arvalee School & Resource Centre, Omagh	Special	0	0	0
St Gerards Education Resource Centre	Special	0	0	0
		20,099	216	20,315

It should be noted that the figure for Coláiste Feirste, Belfast and Foyle & Londonderry College include site purchases of £2,325k and £14,500k respectively.

Expenditure for the current financial year reflects payments against invoices presented as at 31 October 2012.

Education and Training Strategy: 14 to 19

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many meetings his Department's Permanent Secretary has chaired since 2009 between his Department and the Department for Employment and Learning to progress the Education and Training Strategy for 14-19 Year Olds.

(AQW 16947/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to publish a Strategy entitled Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds. My plans are to continue to put the needs of pupils first and my range of policies are being implemented with that objective to the forefront.

I work closely with my colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning, as the education and training of young people aged 14-19 is relevant to both our departments. At Permanent Secretary level, meetings between the two departments are

held regularly. Officials working in the Permanent Secretary's office have access to diary commitments since January 2011. In that time five such meetings have taken place, covering relevant policy developments across the two departments.

My officials also engage directly with their colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning on areas of joint working to ensure the needs of the young people in education, training or seeking employment are met. This will continue to be the case.

Education and Training Strategy: 14 to 19

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when he will publish a draft Education and Training Strategy for 14-19 Year Olds. (AQW 16948/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to publish a Strategy entitled Education and Training for 14-19 Year Olds. My plans are to continue to put the needs of pupils first and my range of policies are being implemented with that objective to the forefront.

I work closely with my colleague the Minister for Employment and Learning, as the education and training of young people aged 14-19 is relevant to both our departments. At Permanent Secretary level, meetings between the two departments are held regularly. Officials working in the Permanent Secretary's office have access to diary commitments since January 2011. In that time five such meetings have taken place, covering relevant policy developments across the two departments.

My officials also engage directly with their colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning on areas of joint working to ensure the needs of the young people in education, training or seeking employment are met. This will continue to be the case.

Further Education: Vocational Courses for School Pupils

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact on the provision of vocational courses for school pupils following the cessation of his Department's funding for Further Education colleges. (AQW 16985/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department funds schools to meet the educational needs of their pupils, not institutes of Further Education.

I am very clear about the benefit of providing access to a wide range of different types of courses to engage and interest pupils and to meet the needs of the economy. That is why I have commenced the legislation to make the Entitlement Framework statutory and why the Entitlement Framework requires schools to offer access to both general and applied courses. All schools will have to ensure that their curricular offer meets the requirements of the Entitlement Framework, which is being phased in from September 2013. Therefore all pupils must be able to access a broad and balanced range of both general and applied courses with clear progression pathways.

Additional funding has been provided as a contribution to support schools in expanding their curricular offer at Key Stage 4 and post-16. This funding will be phased out by April 2014 and schools are aware of this. Schools will subsequently need to ensure that the Entitlement Framework requirements are catered for within their overall delegated budget, in the same way as all other elements of the statutory curriculum.

The Entitlement Framework is about putting pupils first and that must be the cornerstone of schools' curricular planning.

STEM Subjects

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail the percentage increase in the uptake of STEM subjects at (i) GCSE; and (ii) A Level in each of the last five years, broken down by the awarding body. (AQW 16986/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is contained in the tables below.

GCSE entries in STEM subjects in post-primary schools, 2006/07 - 2010/11

	EDXCEL	WJEC	CCEA	OCR	AQA
2006/07	336	200	49,087	1,831	13,105
2007/08	53	249	48,630	1,898	14,359
Percentage Change 2006/07-2007/08	-84.2	24.5	-0.9	3.7	9.6
2008/09	330	217	46,338	1,937	14,220
Percentage Change 2007/08-2008/09	522.6	-12.9	-4.7	2.1	-1.0
2009/10	403	279	45,899	1,826	14,319
Percentage Change 2008/09-2009/10	22.1	28.6	-0.9	-5.7	0.7

	EDXCEL	WJEC	CCEA	OCR	AQA
2010/11	855	133	46,396	1,551	13,521
Percentage Change 2009/10-2010/11	112.2	-52.3	1.1	-15.1	-5.6
Percentage Change 2006/07-2010/11	154.5	-33.5	-5.5	-15.3	3.2

A Level entries in STEM subjects in post-primary schools, 2006/07 - 2010/11

	EDXCEL	WJEC	CCEA	OCR	AQA
2006/07	1,273	21	7,121	486	2,109
2007/08	1,373	17	7,361	472	1,741
Percentage Change 2006/07-2007/08	7.9	-19.0	3.4	-2.9	-17.4
2008/09	1,461	45	7,691	434	1,819
Percentage Change 2007/08-2008/09	6.4	164.7	4.5	-8.1	4.5
2009/10	1,309	84	8,811	424	1,619
Percentage Change 2008/09-2009/10	-10.4	86.7	14.6	-2.3	-11.0
2010/11	1,461	72	9,153	383	1,590
Percentage Change 2009/10-2010/11	11.6	-14.3	3.9	-9.7	-1.8
Percentage Change 2006/07-2010/11	14.8	242.9	28.5	-21.2	-24.6

Substitute Teacher Register

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the Northern Ireland Substitute Teachers Register was last tendered through a public procurement process.

(AQW 16988/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The contract for the Substitute Teacher Register was awarded in 2003 without a public procurement process on the basis that no other supplier offered a suitable product. The contract has since been extended for operational reasons.

It is intended that procurement of a substitute teachers' register will be addressed within the Strategy that has been developed to modernise the ICT Infrastructure in Education.

Schools: Discipline and Sanctions

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what advice his Department issues to schools in relation to developing and implementing policies on school discipline and sanctions.

(AQW 16989/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department's publication "Promoting and Sustaining Good Behaviour: A Discipline Strategy for Schools" (1998) was issued to schools to support them to develop and maintain a coherent and consistent approach to promoting good behaviour. This guidance is based on a support model of progressively more intensive interventions for pupils whose behaviour is challenging. A further publication issued "Pastoral Care in Schools: Promoting Positive Behaviour" (2001) offers best practice guidelines on successful discipline strategies and practices in schools.

Schools can also access additional advice and support from Behaviour Support Teams within the Education and Library Boards. These Teams can offer advice on developing whole school approaches to good behaviour, classroom management skills and immediate advice on action in response to serious incidents.

Free School Meals

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of children in year 8 in receipt of free school meals, in each grammar school, for each of the last ten years.

(AQW 17012/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the assembly library.

Capital Projects

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when he will announce his autumn list of capital projects, to which he referred in his statement to the Assembly on 25 June 2012.

(AQW 17030/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Work is on-going on the assessment of potential major capital build projects to be advanced in planning, as well as the procedures for a new Schools Enhancement programme aimed at refurbishing or extending existing schools.

While I had intended to make an announcement before the Christmas recess it will now be the New Year before I will be in a position to do so.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education whether the Northern Ireland Numeracy and Literacy Assessments are being provided to schools via the C2K network.

(AQW 17031/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that the NINA and NILA assessments are delivered to schools via the C2k network. I am assured by CCEA that an important part of the procurement process was to specify that assessments should be delivered via the C2K managed service.

Nursery Schools: Attendance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education what measures or plans are in place to ensure that children from Irish Traveller, Sinti and Roma backgrounds attend nursery schools.

(AQW 17068/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In line with Programme for Government commitment I am keen to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family who wish to avail of it.

In relation to children from the Traveller community my Department provides support to a regional programme –Toybox - which aims to reduce social and educational inequalities of Traveller children aged 0-4 years old and works with Traveller parents to encourage engagement in the education process and assist with form filling and transition arrangements between pre-school and primary sectors.

My Department also supports a dedicated Education Welfare Officer (EWO) in Belfast Education and Library Board to work with Roma families to encourage them to access and engage in all phases of education.

Irish Language: Primary Schools

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Education what grant assistance is available for primary schools to encourage the development of the Irish language (i) inside; and (ii) outside school.

(AQW 17119/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Modern languages are not currently a compulsory part of the statutory curriculum at primary level. However schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages, including Irish and the revised curriculum provides them with greater flexibility to do so.

To support primary schools wishing to deliver language learning the Primary Languages Programme was introduced in 2007 to give pupils at Foundation Stage/Key Stage 1 the opportunity to learn an additional language in school. Primary schools across the north of Ireland were invited to participate in the programme which provides the opportunity to work with peripatetic language tutors to deliver Irish, Spanish and Polish. The programme has been very successful and as at September 2012, 415 schools are participating in the programme, including 93 primary schools learning Irish.

I have also recently announced a funding scheme, as part of the Extended Schools programme. The scheme is open to all existing Extended School cluster groups to apply for additional funding to provide programmes that will encourage children to develop their skills in the use of Irish and to also provide support for parents who wish to develop their own key literacy and numeracy skills.

I have made available £230k in the 2012/13 financial year with the intention of continuing the funding for the next two years. As the funding will be allocated to cluster groups, which may include schools from all school sectors, it is not possible to provide a breakdown of the total grant assistance available to primary schools.

Common Examinations System

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the importance of a common exams system within the United Kingdom.

(AQW 17138/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not essential that there is a common exams system across Scotland, England, Wales and here. What is essential is the continued comparability and portability of qualifications taken by our young people here.

Our system does not mirror that in Scotland, nor in England or Wales. Indeed, I have allowed exams to be taken in both modular and linear format at GCSE, which is not the case in England.

The review of GCSEs and GCE A Levels that I commissioned in October will ensure that, whatever qualifications I decide are appropriate here, will have parity with other jurisdictions. I will continue to ensure that a learner can take his / her qualification and use it anywhere across these islands to apply for a university place or job as is currently the case.

Area Planning

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Education given that he affirmed in the Irish News on 11 October 2012 that the end of academic selection remains his Department's goal, and that he has stated that Area Planning is taking us to 'a different place', how he anticipates that Area Planning will aid the attainment of the goal of ending academic selection.

(AQW 17164/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is taking forward a range of reforms which together will ensure that our education system is fit for purpose in a rapidly changing modern world. Reform is needed to address the changing school population; to work within tight budget constraints; to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of our economy; and to ensure that every child has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The range of reforms I have set in motion, including area planning, the entitlement framework, the review of the common funding formula and the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority, will all make a contribution to moving our education system forward and make it a truly world class system. It is not the stated purpose of area planning, or indeed of any of these reforms individually, to bring academic selection to an end – but in this changing educational landscape academic selection will become increasingly irrelevant.

Health and Safety: Qualifications

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education why his Department does not accept the Health, Safety and Workshop competency qualification, which can be obtained in England, as an equivalent to the City and Guilds 6131 Workshop Competency qualification obtained at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown.

(AQW 17170/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The health and safety of young people and those who teach them in our schools is of paramount importance. It is therefore vital to ensure that teachers of subjects such as Technology & Design are competent in handling the range of tools used when working with resistant materials (wood, metal and plastics). These skills are central to delivering the practical aspects of the curriculum in the north of Ireland.

Students undertaking Technology & Design teacher training courses in Higher Education Institutions here must meet the City & Guilds 6131 Certificate for Workshop Competence standard (C&G 6131). It is an integral part of the BEd courses offered by Stranmillis and St Mary's University Colleges and the PGCE programmes at the University of Ulster and the Open University.

However, teacher education courses for Technology & Design provided in Britain and elsewhere are wider ranging in nature and scope. Generally, the courses do not require students to reach the necessary standards of practical workshop skills or to cover the course content needed to meet the requirements of the curriculum here. In particular, the specifications for hand skills have been assessed as falling short of what is regarded as acceptable here.

The Department therefore takes the view that in order to ensure the safety of the young people in our classrooms, Technology & Design teachers who have qualified outside the north of Ireland are not trained to an appropriate level. They are therefore required to enhance their workshop competence by obtaining the C&G 6131 standard before they can teach here.

Split-site Schools

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what changes have been made to the funding of split-site post-primary schools in the last five years; and what was the rationale behind these changes.

(AQW 17193/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funding for a dual site school is determined by the relevant funding authority using the criteria set out in paragraphs 4.22-4.23 of the "Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools" guidance (April 2012).

There has been no change to this guidance within the last five years.

STEM Subjects

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what steps are being taken to increase the number of pupils who are studying STEM subjects at GCSE and A-Level.

(AQW 17196/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The revised curriculum which is in place across all year groups in all grant aided schools provides greater freedom for teachers to explore STEM-related learning with pupils. The Entitlement Framework, which will be fully implemented in September 2015, will guarantee all post-primary pupils at Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form greater choice and

flexibility to pursue STEM subjects. In addition, this increased choice is being supported with improved careers education, information, advice and guidance, with a particular focus on STEM-related career opportunities.

However, it is acknowledged that delivery of STEM subjects through discrete timetabled lessons needs to be supplemented with whole-school programmes and special events.

Since publication of the 'Report of the STEM Review' my Department has been undertaking a wide range of interventions to increase the number of pupils studying STEM subjects at GCSE and A-Level. I would refer the member to my answer to his earlier question AQW 6066/11-15 published in the official report on 6 January 2012 highlighting examples of STEM actions. Recent STEM developments to promote STEM subjects at GCSE and A-Level include: STEM curricular assessment tasks for the three cross curricular skills to support the existing STEM Futures enquiry based resources; 6 assessment tasks for using ICT have been developed as exemplar support materials; two video case studies to share good practice using the STEM Futures resources and using Innovation to embed STEM in learning and teaching; and an ICT sector profile has been developed for inclusion on the STEMWorks website. In addition, funding to deliver STEM related events and programmes during 2012/13 include, portfolio of STEM enhancement and enrichment programmes delivered by Sentinus; the BT Young Scientist & Technology Competition, the Stock Market Challenge, Maths Week and the Smart Gear programme.

Redburn Primary School, Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what was the cost to the South Eastern Education and Library Board of razing the old Redburn Primary School in Holywood.

(AQW 17206/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The total cost of the demolition of the former Redburn Primary School is forecast to be in the region of £66,000, which includes approximately £24,000 for removing asbestos.

Site clearance is still ongoing so these figures are approximate and will not be confirmed until the final account is settled.

Schools: Boards of Governors

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the current Boards of Governors are due to be reconstituted.

(AQW 17240/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In normal circumstances school boards of governors are reconstituted every four years. The term of office for most Boards of Governors is due to expire in the 2013/14 school year.

However, the Education Bill proposes that the processes for the reconstitution of school Boards of Governors will transfer to the Education Skills Authority (ESA). Consequently, the timetable for the next reconstitution may be affected by that transfer of function.

Preschool Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how many additional pre-school places will be needed in the 2013/14 school year.

(AQW 17241/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board's Pre-School Education Advisory Group has estimated the demand for pre-school places in 2013/14 based on live birth data which is available on an academic year basis, adjusted to take account of parental application rates over recent years and a tendency in some areas for parents to seek places in ELB areas other than where they live.

On this basis the Department has notified ELBs that they may proceed to secure an additional 668 funded places compared to 2012/13.

The pre-school admissions process is preference based, and until parents express their preferences for pre-school settings it is impossible to predict with certainty where pressures will arise.

My officials will continue to work closely with the ELBs to respond to the demand for funded places in each area.

Preschool Education Advisory Groups

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the advice that each Pre-School Education Advisory Group has given him on pre-school provision for the 2013/2014 school year.

(AQW 17242/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Each Education and Library Board's Pre-School Education Advisory Group has estimated the demand for pre-school places in 2013/14 based on live birth data which is available on an academic year basis, adjusted to take account of parental application rates over recent years and a tendency in some areas for parents to seek places in ELB areas other than where they live.

On this basis the Department has notified ELBs that they may proceed to secure an additional 668 funded places compared to 2012/13.

The pre-school admissions process is preference based, and until parents express their preferences for pre-school settings it is impossible to predict with certainty where pressures will arise.

My officials will continue to work closely with the ELBs to respond to the demand for funded places in each area.

Free School Meals

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils in each constituency received free school meals in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17263/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils entitled to free school meals by constituency of school location, 2007/08 – 2011/12

Constituency	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12
Belfast East	1,987	1,866	2,071	2,504	2,911
Belfast North	5,336	5,156	6,116	6,804	7,749
Belfast South	2,409	2,316	2,865	2,998	3,445
Belfast West	7,331	6,965	7,072	7,635	8,672
East Antrim	1,805	1,715	1,944	2,133	2,542
East Derry	2,539	2,465	3,193	3,409	3,929
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	2,843	2,717	3,137	3,398	3,937
Foyle	7,338	7,059	6,935	7,332	7,752
Lagan Valley	1,965	1,830	1,715	2,013	2,473
Mid Ulster	2,950	2,860	3,179	3,533	4,008
Newry and Armagh	4,291	4,147	4,299	4,736	5,291
North Antrim	2,670	2,612	2,830	3,089	3,577
North Down	1,261	1,179	1,224	1,539	1,970
South Antrim	1,922	1,858	1,542	1,674	2,100
South Down	3,114	3,042	3,022	3,476	4,089
Strangford	1,805	1,703	1,703	2,037	2,466
Upper Bann	3,370	3,336	3,642	4,277	4,570
West Tyrone	3,780	3,741	3,994	4,388	4,825
Total	58,716	56,567	60,483	66,975	76,306

Source: school census

Note:

- 1 Figures include pupils in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres, nursery schools, primary schools (including nursery units and reception), post primary schools and special schools.
- 2 Figures for nursery children and those in funded places in voluntary and private preschool centres include those who had a parent in receipt of Job Seeker's Allowance or Income Support at the time of each school census exercise.
- 3 Constituency has been assigned using location of schools/preschool centres attended.

A Levels: Terminology

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 13960/11-15, why in the table of A Level results Northern Ireland is referred to as the North of Ireland.

(AQW 17281/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The language and terminology used in answers to members' questions reflects my personal preference.

Special Educational Needs

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what assistance his Department plans to give to teachers in mainstream schools in managing children who have a statement of Special Educational Needs.

(AQW 17282/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In all mainstream schools a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school's special educational needs (SEN) policy and co-ordination of SEN provision. Senior management should ensure that structures within the school allow the SENCO's functions to be carried out effectively.

My priority is to ensure that every child, including those with a statement of special educational needs (SEN), receives a high quality education. To that end I am continuing to put in place a range of policies aimed at raising standards, including the school improvement policy and the Review of SEN and Inclusion.

One of the main contributors to the Department of Education's key aim to raise standards in all our schools is the development of the education workforce to meet the needs of all our pupils. To this end education and library boards must ensure that arrangements for necessary training of teachers and classroom assistants, who are supporting children with SEN, are in place.

I attach great importance to building the capacity of all schools to manage the needs of children with SEN. During 2011 a comprehensive SEN resource file was made available to primary and post-primary schools and teachers can also access materials on Learning NI and the DE website.

Electricity Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what his Department's electricity costs have been over the last three financial years. **(AQW 17287/11-15)**

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has incurred expenditure on electricity in each of the last three financial years as shown in the following table:

2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2011-12 £'000
4	4	18

Glencraig Curative School

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Education how many children attend Glencraig Curative School; and what is the school's maximum capacity.

(AQW 17308/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The 2012/13 school enrolments census records that 21 pupils attend Glencraig Curative School. With regard to the school's maximum capacity (taken to mean the school's approved enrolment number), Glencraig Curative School is an independent school. The Department of Education does not set approved enrolment numbers for independent schools because these schools are entitled to make their own arrangements for the admission of pupils.

Education: Average Cost by Sector

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the average cost of educating a child in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school broken down by sector; and how this compares with the cost in 2007/08

(AQW 17309/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The tables below provide the average delegated and non-delegated Resource expenditure per primary and post-primary school pupil, broken down by sector, for both the 2007-08 and 2011-12 Financial Years.

	Average Expenditure per Pupil 2007/08 £	Average Expenditure per Pupil 2011/12 £
Primary		
Controlled	3,325	3,705
Controlled Integrated	3,574	3,761
Maintained	3,271	3,706
Irish Medium	3,579	4,339
Grant-Maintained Integrated	3,406	3,685

Post-Primary	Average Expenditure per Pupil 2007/08 £	Average Expenditure per Pupil 2011/12 £
Controlled	5,083	5,753
Controlled Integrated	4,725	5,557
Controlled Grammar	4,217	4,888
Maintained	4,899	5,787
Irish Medium	4,345	5,164
Voluntary Grammar	4,331	4,669
Grant-Maintained Integrated	5,042	5,393

Notes

- (i) Data for Primary Schools includes Nursery Classes within Primary Schools. It is not possible to disaggregate the costs of pupils in nursery classes from those of primary pupils in Primary schools which have the Nursery Units attached;
- (ii) Data for Irish Medium (IM) Primary includes Controlled IM and Other Maintained IM Schools;
- (iii) It is not possible to disaggregate the costs of pupils attending Primary and Post-Primary Irish Medium Units which are attached to English Medium host schools.
- (iv) Data for Post-Primary schools includes Preparatory Departments attached to Controlled Grammar and Voluntary Grammar Schools as it is not possible to disaggregate this data from the host school expenditure;
- (v) Data included for 2011-12 in respect of Voluntary Grammar and Grant-Maintained Integrated Schools is provisional pending validation by the Department; and
- (vi) Data excludes capital expenditure which is not available in the format requested.

Age-weighted Pupil Unit

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to explain the rationale behind the changes to the age weighted pupil unit. (AQW 17312/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The criteria for funding of pupils based on the age weighted pupil unit is set out in paragraphs 3.4 - 3.7 and Annex G of the "Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools" guidance (April 2012).

There has been no change to this guidance in recent years.

Consultation: Parents and Teachers

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the level of consultation which his Department has with (i) parents; and (ii) teachers. (AQW 17313/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education routinely consults with all interested parties including parents and teachers in line with guidance provided by the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he raised any reservations with the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment following the pilot scheme for the online Northern Ireland Literacy and Numeracy Assessments, prior to the roll out to all primary schools. (AQW 17314/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been assured by CCEA that the outcomes of the trial were evaluated, changes made to address concerns and there were no significant technical issues evident prior to specifying the assessments. Over 30% of all primary schools took part in the trialling during the period January to May 2012. The purpose of these trials was to ensure that the assessments were fit for purpose; that they were compatible with the C2K network and schools' systems; and that any issues could be identified and addressed and lessons learnt. I have requested a full report from CCEA on the operation of the new assessments. This will include an analysis of why the difficulties experienced by schools were not apparent to the same extent during the extensive trial period.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education what guidance he is providing to schools on the distribution of late outcomes of the Northern Ireland Literacy and Numeracy online assessments.

(AQW 17315/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I wrote to primary schools on 12 November, advising that I expect all schools to continue with the assessments before the end of term and use the outcomes to engage with parents and inform teaching and learning over the coming year.

In terms of the requirement to report to parents by the end of the Autumn term, the legislation allows no room for flexibility, however, I advised schools that where parent meetings have taken place or are about to take place, it is not expected that they are rescheduled or the assessments completed in advance, unless this is convenient for the school. Schools were advised to run the assessments at a suitable point over the course of the rest of the term and communicate the qualitative outcomes in whatever format or wording that they see fit. Parents should be advised that if they wish to discuss these outcomes further, the school will endeavour to make arrangements to do so as soon as possible, though this may not be practically possible before the end of the current term.

CCEA has been contacting schools who had yet to start their assessments to ensure that they are able to make progress and report outcomes to parents as planned. Schools which started the assessments but felt unable to continue earlier in the term have been advised to now put arrangements in places to allow their pupils' assessments to proceed and CCEA is in the process of contacting the schools which registered technical difficulties this term to facilitate this.

I recognise, however, that for a small number of these schools, rescheduling the assessments may present particular difficulties and in such instances, I have indicated that individual schools should contact the Department.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education whether he is aware of a view amongst primary school leaders that they have difficulty in standing over the accuracy of the results of the numeracy and literacy online assessments; and what plans he has to review these tests in light of the recent technical and other related issues.

(AQW 17316/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have requested a full report from CCEA on the operation of the new assessments. This will include an analysis of why the difficulties experienced by some schools were not apparent to the same extent during the extensive trial period. In addition, the Education and Training Inspectorate will conduct a survey to determine how effectively schools make use of this assessment information and what their experiences have been to date. I will review its findings later in this school year.

As I have stated elsewhere, the effective use of computer-based assessment data is a key aspect of my drive to raise standards of literacy and numeracy for our pupils. If technical issues or procurement rules risk interfering with this focus on the pupil, then we need to look at ways of removing that risk. I will be outlining how I plan to use the experiences of computer-based assessment in the current and previous terms to inform policy in the future. I can assure you that consultation and engagement with schools will be at the heart of this.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to explain the rationale behind online computer based assessments being a statutory requirement for primary schools.

(AQW 17317/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The statutory requirement to conduct computer based assessment in schools in the Autumn term using an approved tool was established in 2007 with the first assessments specified in 2009. This has ensured that all schools have conducted a common assessment, standardised against our population, free of charge to schools.

'Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools' (TNC 2009/2)

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether political parties, churches and education interests were consulted before the publication of the document 'An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2)'; and what was his Department's assessment of the responses.

(AQW 17343/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools was agreed by the Teachers' Negotiating Committee (TNC), which comprises representatives of the Employing Authorities, the recognised teacher unions and the Department of Education. The document was developed in consultation with the Equality Commission, having regard to the Commission's Code of Practice for Fair Employment and Model Equality Opportunities Policy. There was no consultation with political parties or churches.

'Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools' (TNC 2009/2)

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether Education and Library Boards have ever instituted any disciplinary action against Boards of Governors for misconduct in relation to breaches of An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2) regarding the appointment of teachers.

(AQW 17345/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that they have never instituted any disciplinary action against Boards of Governors for misconduct in relation to breaches of An Equal Opportunity Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2) regarding the appointment of teachers.

'Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools' (TNC 2009/2)

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether the composition of teachers, applicants for employment and appointments in controlled schools has been monitored annually on the basis of religious belief and political opinion, as required in An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2); and where these results are published.

(AQW 17348/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have advised that they have not monitored the composition of teachers, applicants for employment and appointments in controlled schools on the basis of religious belief and political opinion as there is no statutory obligation to do so.

The Boards are aware of the requirement detailed in TNC Circular 2009/2. However, on the basis of resource limitations and imminent reorganisation, non-statutory monitoring has not been introduced. It is expected this will be addressed when a centralised monitoring system is introduced on the establishment of the Education Skills Authority.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16865/11-15, how many of the associate assessors used in the last five years were serving as a Principal or Vice Principal; and how many were from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services.

(AQW 17354/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: For the purpose of this answer, the data relating to 'years' is given in academic years, beginning with the September 2007 to June 2008 academic year.

In the last five years, there were 120 individual Associate Assessors used who were serving as a Principal or Vice-Principal. It should be noted that some of these individuals will have been deployed on more than one inspection during this 5-year period.

The number of Associate Assessors used in the last five years, who were from the Curriculum Advisory and Support Services, cannot be disclosed as the figure is 5 or less. Statistical data of 5 or less cannot be released in order to ensure the personal identity of individuals is protected, in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether he will follow the practice used in the Health Service and involve lay people in the appointment of members of the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 17355/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: All interview selection panels that are established by HR Connect, are in line with the NICS Recruitment Procedures. Panels for the Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) recruitment competitions, consist of two senior members of ETI and one senior civil servant.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether the press briefing given by the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate on 17 October 2012, in which she identified the management of 22 percent of primary schools and 39 percent of secondary schools as not good enough, was in breach of the confidentiality normally observed by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 17356/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I can confirm that the press briefing given by the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate on 17 October 2012, in which she identified the management of 22 percent of primary schools and 39 percent of secondary schools as not good enough, was not in breach of the confidentiality normally observed by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16584/11-15, whether any of the information requested can be provided within the cost limit or can be provided in a different format.

(AQW 17357/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Unfortunately, pursuant to AQW 16584/11-15, it is not possible to provide any of the information requested within the cost limit or in a different format. The costs involved in obtaining such information would be disproportionate.

Prompt Payment

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17362/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Details of how each of my Department's Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) has performed against the 30 Day Prompt Payment Performance Target in the full 2011-12 financial year and 2012-13 financial year to the end of October 2012 are listed in the following table.

NDPB	Financial Year 2011/12 %	Year to date 2012/13 %
Belfast Education & Library Board (ELB)	81	89
North Eastern ELB	83	84
South Eastern ELB	90	87
Southern ELB	89	88
Western ELB	85	87
Council for Catholic Maintained Schools	100	100
Council for Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment	85	91
Staff Commission for ELBs	100	100
Youth Council for Northern Ireland	100	100
Comhairle na Gaelscoilaíochta	88	99
Council for Integrated Education	100	100
General Teaching Council	100	100
Middletown Centre for Autism	96	100

My Department publishes the prompt payment performance of its NDPBs on the Department's web-site and a further breakdown of the information can be viewed by following the links below:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/prompt_payment_tables_2011-2012.pdf

http://www.deni.gov.uk/microsoft_word_-_ndpbs_prompt_payment_table__for_2012-_2013.pdf

Payment performance information by sector is not currently recorded and reported on by either the Department nor its NDPBs.

Languages: GCSE and A Level

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what action his Department is taking to encourage pupils to study modern languages at GCSE and A Level.

(AQW 17369/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I very much recognise the importance of language learning both socially and economically. Learning a second language can help our young people to become creative, confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in our increasingly diverse society and to achieve to their full potential.

Modern languages are a statutory requirement at KS3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and Sixth form. Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages and the recently introduced revised curriculum offers schools more flexibility in the choices of subjects they can offer to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools are now able to choose from any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the requirements of the statutory curriculum, and can also add any other additional languages as they wish.

At Key Stage 4 the Entitlement Framework legislation will require schools to ensure that they offer pupils access to at least one course in a modern language, which will provide more pupils with the opportunity to choose to continue with languages at this key stage and post-16.

In addition, I have recently received a copy of the report 'Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy', which has been prepared by the joint University of Ulster-Queen's University Belfast, Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, and which considers language learning at all levels and across a broad spectrum of activity. I will study the report and will be looking carefully, within the resources available to me, at how best to move forward on those recommendations that are focused on the teaching and learning of modern languages in schools.

Languages: GCSE and A Level

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many (i) GCSE; and (ii) A Level pupils studied (a) French; (b) German; (c) Spanish; and (d) Chinese in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 17370/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Answer is contained in the tables below:

GCSE Examination Entries 2001/02 - 2010/11

	French	German	Spanish	Chinese
2001/02	13,173	1,390	2,716	10
2002/03	12,524	1,244	3,077	15
2003/04	12,436	1,266	2,945	19
2004/05	11,239	1,315	3,132	19
2005/06	10,658	1,264	2,848	14
2006/07	10,415	1,203	3,046	15
2007/08	9,008	1,204	3,232	21
2008/09	7,605	1,208	3,060	30
2009/10	7,100	1,251	3,113	12
2010/11	6,510	1,044	3,342	13

A Level Examination Entries 2001/02 - 2010/11

	French	German	Spanish	Chinese
2001/02	959	244	397	11
2002/03	794	201	405	18
2003/04	792	184	432	12
2004/05	725	133	402	21
2005/06	701	143	406	28
2006/07	662	145	458	16
2007/08	694	159	415	30
2008/09	657	137	407	37
2009/10	707	153	443	26
2010/11	562	113	461	30

Source: RM data solutions

Modern languages are a statutory requirement at KS3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and Post 16. Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages, and the recently introduced revised curriculum offers schools more flexibility in the choices of subjects they can offer to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools are now able to choose from any of the languages of the 27 EU member states to meet the requirements of the statutory curriculum, and can also offer additional languages if they wish.

In addition, at Key Stage 4 the Entitlement Framework legislation will require schools to ensure that they offer pupils access to at least one course in a modern language, which may mean that more pupils choose to continue with languages at this key stage and post-16.

Preschool Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) how much each Education and Library Board has spent on pre-school education in each of the last five years; (ii) how much each Board will be spending on pre-school education in each of the next three years; (iii) how many children have accessed pre-school provision in each Board area, in each of the last five years; and (iv) how many children are expected to receive pre-school provision in each of the next three years, in each Board area.

(AQW 17398/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) The following table shows the sums allocated to pre-school education providers, either by DE or through Education and Library Boards (ELBs), to support the delivery of the pre-school curriculum over the last 5 years. Pre-school education providers may also attract funding from sources other than ELBs, for a variety of reasons, both structural and operational.

Type of Pre-School Setting	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Nursery Schools (1)	£17,067,684	£17,614,204	£17,940,033	£18,287,744	£18,268,286
Nursery Units (2) (3)	£17,789,915	£18,654,300	£19,155,504	£19,799,042	£20,226,771
Voluntary and Private Settings	£10,311,000	£10,591,000	£13,625,000	£14,130,000	£15,699,000

Notes:

- (1) These figures represent the totality of funding allocated under the Common Funding Formula.
- (2) These figures represent the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) component of funding allocated to Nursery Units located at primary schools. It is not possible to disaggregate funding distributed to primary schools for Nursery Unit pupils and show a total funding figure allocated under the Common Funding Formula.
- (3) Includes Nursery Unit pupils at Grant Maintained Integrated primary schools (funded through DE).
- (ii) Levels of expenditure across the next three years will reflect the Programme for Government commitment to ensure that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it, and will depend upon the number of applications for pre-school places in each ELB area.
- (iii) Enrolments at nursery schools and nursery classes within primary schools, and voluntary and private pre-school providers, during the last five years were as follows:

	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	TOTAL
2008/09	3394	3809	4797	4387	4938	21,325
2009/10	3422	3861	4823	4388	4977	21,471
2010/11	3555	3995	5037	4707	5205	22,499
2011/12	3583	4020	5314	4864	5392	23,173
2012/13	3528	3834	4978	4865	5332	22,537*

* This is the number of children placed at the end of the pre-school admissions process in May 2012. Children continued to be placed between May and the beginning of the new school term in September 2012. The final number of children placed in the current school year will not be known until the results of the 2012 school census are published early in 2013.

- (iv) An area by area analysis of predicted demand is not available three years in advance, but an indication of predicted demand can be obtained from live births data on NINIS (NI Neighbourhood Information Service) which indicates that the target age of the pre-school cohort will be 25,403 for the 2014/15 academic year compared to 24,963 for the 2013/14 academic year. This data source does not allow for predictions of demand beyond the 2014/15 cohort of target age children.

'Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools' (TNC 2009/2)

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education whether the policy of Education and Library Boards, as laid out in An Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2), that requires equality of opportunity in all controlled school teacher appointments, irrespective of religious belief, negates Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 (as amended), which makes it lawful for teachers' employers to take account of an applicant's religious belief and to discriminate accordingly.

(AQW 17409/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Equal Opportunities Policy for Teachers in Schools (TNC 2009/2) makes specific reference to Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 and notes that it is not unlawful for the employers of school teachers to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief or political opinion in relation to the recruitment of persons as teachers in schools.

Paragraph 2.1 of the policy notes that "Eligibility criteria for all teaching posts will reflect the ethos of the school sector". Those selecting persons for appointment as teachers are therefore required to take this matter into account.

Paragraph 3.1 of the policy records the Board's commitment to "the prevention of unlawful discrimination", the opposition of the Board and the Board of Governors to "all forms of unlawful discrimination" and requires teachers to "be aware of the forms which unlawful discrimination can take, guard against them and avoid any action which might influence others to discriminate unlawfully".

The document must be taken as a whole. It is designed to facilitate the consideration of a school's ethos in the appointment process and does not require persons to avoid actions which are lawful by virtue of Article 71 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

The policy in question therefore does not negate Article 71.

School Inspections

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16828/11-15, how his Department uses school inspection reports to change practice in schools.

(AQW 17415/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) promotes individual school improvement by identifying the most significant strengths and areas for improvement, providing detailed recommendations and through close engagement with senior leaders. The publication of inspection reports enables good practice to be shared. Furthermore, ETI's monitoring of all schools through the work of District Inspectors and Follow-Up Inspections contributes strongly to improvement.

Information from inspection is used to inform the development of policy and to inform the department on the outworkings of its policy. In addition, the ETI promotes school improvement by highlighting areas for improvement in the school system through the Chief Inspectors' Report and in specific survey reports, including those specifically charged to identify good and outstanding practice.

Also, the ETI, in collaboration with the Regional Training Unit organises conferences for principals to showcase good practice from primary and post-primary schools which have recently been inspected. Increasingly the ETI is working with ESaGS TV to record and share good practice.

Curriculum Advisory and Support Service

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education how recent is the classroom and school management experience of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service staff who were used as associates by the Education and Training Inspectorate.

(AQW 17416/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The classroom and school management experience of the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service staff, who were used as Associate Assessors by the Education Training Inspectorate is individual and personal to each Associate Assessor and therefore it would not be appropriate to disclose it in this forum.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 16861/11-15 which states that all inspection evidence is treated confidentially, why the Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate briefed the press on 17 October 2012 advising that two years ago 33 percent of the managements of secondary schools inspected were not up to standard but now the figure is 39 percent and that the quality of leadership and management in many schools was found by inspection to be not good enough.

(AQW 17417/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Chief Inspector of the Education and Training Inspectorate did not release confidential inspection evidence during the press briefing on 17 October 2012. The statistical data which was released as part of the press briefing would not enable the identity of a school or individual to be discovered.

As stated in AQW 16861/11-15, all inspection evidence is treated confidentially and evidence unique to each individual is handled under the terms of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Education and Skills Authority Board

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education, given that there is no Youth Service representation on the Education and Skills Authority Board, how he intends the voice of young people to be heard in priorities of youth policy and future policies in this area.

(AQW 17425/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In developing its strategic education policies, the Department recognises the importance of ensuring that the voices of young people are heard.

Before drafting the Priorities for Youth policy, the Department undertook a comprehensive pre-consultation exercise to establish views from within the youth sector and wider educational service. This was done through a variety of means including questionnaires, focus group meetings, street-based consultations, seminars and workshops. Around 4,000 young people directly contributed their views to the pre-consultation.

The current consultation on the Priorities for Youth which is due to close on 10 December 2012 has similarly encouraged the participation of young people through a variety of means. Organisations across the youth sector have engaged widely with young people and I expect a high response rate, both from youth organisations and from young people themselves.

Supporting and promoting participation is at the heart of the Priorities for Youth policy proposals and the Department will continue to engage with young people with regard to the development of future education policies. It is anticipated that the establishment of new participative structures such as the Network for Youth and the proposed Youth Assembly will provide additional means through which the Department can engage with young people on matters that are important to them.

Nursery School Places: Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Education how many children in the Derry City Council area have not received a nursery school place for the 2012/13 academic year; and how many places are still available in that area, broken down by electoral ward.

(AQW 17452/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The pre-school admissions process for the 2012/13 academic year comprised two stages, with the first stage limited to applications from target age children in their immediate pre-school year.

Within the Derry City Council area there were 111 target age children unplaced at the end of the first stage of the process. Applicants were invited to submit further preferences at Stage 2 of the process, and 57 chose to do so, all of whom were placed at the conclusion of the process.

In the period that has elapsed since the process concluded Western Education and Library Board records indicate that 16 target age children remain unplaced. These are children of parents who either did not engage fully with both stages of the process or whose applications were submitted after the deadlines which apply to the process.

Education and Training Inspectorate: Cambridge House Grammar School

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education when the latest Education and Training Inspectorate report on Cambridge House Grammar School will be published; and what has caused the delay in publication.

(AQW 17465/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The latest Education and Training Inspectorate report on Cambridge House Grammar School was published on Tuesday 4 December 2012.

The main findings of the inspection were shared with the school's management and Board of Governors at the end of the inspection. There is no definitive publication deadline for follow-up inspection reports. However, publication of this report was in line with the time allowed for standard inspection reports.

Education and Skills Authority Board

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail the processes which will be used to make the final decisions on appointing the Chairperson and four board members of the Education and Skills Authority Board.

(AQW 17485/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The arrangements for appointing the ESA Chair and four members representative of the community are currently being taken forward in compliance with the Commissioner for Public Appointment's Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments.

The posts have been advertised and applicants are asked to demonstrate that they possess the essential knowledge, experience and skills required. Following the application and interview stages, the selection panel will provide me with a list of those candidates recommended as suitable for appointment. Together with a summary providing an objective analysis of each candidate's skills and experience based on the information provided by each candidate during the appointment round. I will decide who should be appointed with the purpose of achieving the best mix of skills and experience for the board.

Returned Resources

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the total level of resources returned by his Department to the Department of Finance and Personnel since May 2011.

(AQW 17502/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The only amount my Department has returned to Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) since May 2011 was £10.5 million of budget cover in the January 2012 monitoring round relating to the drawdown of schools surplus funds.

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the total costs of the Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment over each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 17512/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The detail of the total costs of the Council for Curriculum Examination and Assessment over each of the last 5 years are set out in the table below:

CCEA Annual Recurrent Expenditure

Financial Year	Gross Expenditure	Earned Income	Net Expenditure
	£000s	£000s	£000s
2007/08	30,242	8,565	21,677
2008/09	30,384	9,133	21,251
2009/10	31,272	9,402	21,870
2010/11	27,822	9,569	18,253
2011/12	31,493	10,045	21,448

Note 1: The gross expenditure figures exclude capital expenditure.

Note 2: The above figures are from the CCEA audited annual report and accounts, available on their website.

Preschool Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16662/11-15, how many additional places have been secured by each Education and Library Board in advance of this year's enrolment process.

(AQW 17513/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The table below shows the number of pre-school places secured at statutory and non-statutory pre-school settings in advance of the admissions process commencing for 2012/13 and 2013/14.

Increases at statutory settings arise through the approval of development proposals brought forward by Education and Library Boards, whilst increases at non-statutory settings arise from decisions made by Pre-School Education Advisory Groups within Education and Library Boards.

	BELB	WELB	NEELB	SEELB	SELB	Total
2012/13	3,559	3,995	5,296	4,970	5,466	23,286
2013/14	3,586	4,044	5,375	5,045	5,827	23,877
Increase	27	49	79	75	361	591

Once the process commences the number of places secured may vary through either of these two decision making processes.

GCSEs and A levels: Review

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to outline the timetable for the review of GCSEs and A levels; and when it is anticipated that the first set of pupils will commence any revised examination syllabus.

(AQW 17514/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: As I announced in the Assembly on 1 October 2012, CCEA has been tasked to undertake the review of A Levels and GCSEs and to set-up a Steering Group consisting of key stakeholders from schools, Further Education and Higher Education sectors and employers. CCEA will produce 2 interim reports in January 2013 and March 2013 respectively, with a final report due in June 2013.

I will consider the findings in the final report and make decisions in the best interests of our young people. Until then I will not speculate on what, if any, changes may be made to our examinations system.

Irish Medium Team: CCEA

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16939/11-15, why the costs associated with the Direct Support team have increased in the last three years.

(AQW 17515/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In 2009, the Department initiated a programme by which CCEA was tasked with significantly increasing the availability of curriculum support materials for the Irish Medium sector and specifically to address recommendations 15 and 16 of the Review of Irish-Medium Education Report.

This has enhanced the availability of curriculum support materials for the Irish-Medium sector, thereby significantly increasing expenditure.

Irish Medium Team: CCEA

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16939/11-15, for a breakdown of the costs associated with the Direct Support team in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17516/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10
IM Team Cost - Breakdown:	Cost £	Cost £	Cost £
Staff Salaries inc Employer Costs	398,671.05	370,247.72	250,232.96
Staff Mileage and Other Travel Expenses	7,067.18	8,428.06	7,977.33
Temporary Staff inc Employer Costs	39,293.29	1,556.23	0.00
Stationery & Misc Office Expenses	2,499.40	4,193.14	501.62
Total Team Cost	447,530.92	384,425.15	258,711.91

Note 1: Average Salaried Staff in Post for Year: 2011/12 - 9.8, 2010/11 - 8.9, 2009/10 - 5.8

Note 2: As with response to original AQW 16939/11-15 costs are for the direct team costs and do not include the cost of any materials that were produced e.g. the production/print cost of support materials.

Schools: Religious Backgrounds

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education for a breakdown of the number of children from each religious background in (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary schools in each council area.

(AQW 17537/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is provided in the tables below.

Religion of children in primary schools by District Council area, 2011/12

Council Area	Protestant	Catholic	Other Christian	non-Christian	no religion/ religion not stated	Total
Antrim	1,845	2,474	166	32	688	5,205
Ards	3,959	764	234	50	1,216	6,223
Armagh	2,315	3,079	101	9	310	5,814
Ballymena	3,411	1,420	155	20	594	5,600
Ballymoney	1,399	1,051	#	*	213	2,730
Banbridge	2,824	1,556	90	15	322	4,807
Belfast	7,381	12,959	798	485	2,790	24,413
Carrickfergus	2,225	243	238	9	755	3,470
Castlereagh	2,722	1,660	230	56	1,053	5,721
Coleraine	2,548	1,374	175	23	753	4,873
Cookstown	1,059	2,343	55	6	200	3,663
Craigavon	3,107	4,743	264	76	957	9,147
Derry	1,747	9,075	137	84	331	11,374
Down	1,412	4,400	119	11	501	6,443
Dungannon	1,440	4,051	105	13	178	5,787
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	1,805	3,547	100	14	212	5,678
Larne	1,306	646	#	*	392	2,441

Council Area	Protestant	Catholic	Other Christian	non-Christian	no religion/ religion not stated	Total
Limavady	883	1,887	#	*	111	2,913
Lisburn	4,365	4,191	392	56	1,390	10,394
Magherafelt	919	3,251	#	*	101	4,340
Moyle	401	1,006	#	*	91	1,522
Newry And Mourne	1,102	8,773	74	30	198	10,177
Newtownabbey	3,930	1,508	310	57	1,080	6,885
North Down	3,150	834	416	56	1,728	6,184
Omagh	1,049	3,861	43	11	180	5,144
Strabane	854	2,813	#	*	168	3,864
Total	59,158	83,509	4,202	1,113	16,512	164,812

Religion of children in post-primary schools by District Council area, 2011/12

Council Area	Protestant	Catholic	Other Christian	non-Christian	no religion/ religion not stated	Total
Antrim	1,189	609	69	9	232	2,108
Ards	2,475	378	186	20	646	3,705
Armagh	1,552	3,249	44	13	105	4,963
Ballymena	3,563	1,798	126	18	540	6,045
Ballymoney	1,201	271	#	*	174	1,736
Banbridge	2,851	815	114	15	266	4,061
Belfast	9,646	16,173	801	235	2,729	29,584
Carrickfergus	1,873	208	190	9	555	2,835
Castlereagh	1,537	1,712	105	28	532	3,914
Coleraine	1,971	1,795	161	22	406	4,355
Cookstown	727	856	8	5	157	1,753
Craigavon	3,179	3,124	217	45	253	6,818
Derry	1,583	8,626	61	48	152	10,470
Down	1,652	4,566	68	10	350	6,646
Dungannon	1,558	4,102	114	11	145	5,930
Fermanagh And South Tyrone	1,588	3,291	91	20	159	5,149
Larne	1,084	876	#	*	79	2,076
Limavady	1,160	1,397	28	8	102	2,695
Lisburn	3,509	1,393	182	22	513	5,619
Magherafelt	1,179	4,494	116	5	68	5,862
Moyle	709	796	#	*	87	1,624
Newry And Mourne	1,127	8,443	48	23	64	9,705
Newtownabbey	4,039	695	320	26	534	5,614
North Down	3,697	550	448	34	839	5,568
Omagh	1,205	3,771	70	8	83	5,137

Council Area	Protestant	Catholic	Other Christian	non-Christian	no religion/ religion not stated	Total
Strabane	823	1,903	11	9	29	2,775
Total	56,677	75,891	3,578	643	9,799	146,747

Source: school census.

Note:

- 1 Based on school location.
 - 2 Figures for primary schools include children in nursery, reception and Year 1 – 7 classes.
- ‘*’ relates to fewer than 5 cases.
- ‘#’ means a figure ≥ 5 has been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere.

Blind and Partially Sighted Pupils

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Education how many blind and partially sighted pupils are based in special educational needs provision.

(AQW 17551/11-15)

Mr O’Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Special schools and learning support centres - Pupils who are recorded as being blind or partially sighted in special schools and learning support centres, 2011/12

Need type	Total pupils
Blind	25
Partially sighted	147
Total	172

Source: school census

Note:

- 1 Figures above include pupils enrolled attending special schools and learning support centres in primary and post primary schools.
- 2 Figures relate to pupils at Stage 1 – 5 on the Special Education Needs Code of Practice.

Department for Employment and Learning

European Languages: Night Classes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what plans he has to increase the number of night-time classes for learning a European language.

(AQW 17019/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): My Department sets high level targets in respect of the curriculum to be delivered by the further education sector, and agrees broad targets with individual colleges through the annual college development planning process.

Colleges offer a wide range of economically focused provision, tailored to meet both regional and local needs. Decisions on whether specific courses are run are driven by the level of demand locally and it is the responsibility of individual colleges to meet the needs of learners and employers in their areas in a cost effective way that ensures best use of public money.

Further Education Colleges currently offer an extensive range of language courses as part of their curriculum provision. These courses are proactively marketed by Colleges using their websites and prospectuses and by active use of a variety of social media.

Colleges also currently engage in marketing language provision to a variety of external businesses, employers and partners.

Universities are independent autonomous institutions responsible for their own policies and procedures, including course provision. My officials contacted Queen’s University and the University of Ulster to request details of current night-time European language classes. Their responses are attached at Annex A.

Annex A**The University of Ulster****School of Modern Languages**

The School of Modern Languages provides the following night provision for European languages:

Semester 1 of AY 2012/13:

- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Preliminary and Intermediate French for the Workplace”. Course duration: 12 weeks. Total credit points - 25
- Out centre teaching (in industry) – 4 hours per week (2 parallel groups) – “Preliminary French for Business”. Course duration: 15 weeks - Total credit points - 15
- Out centre teaching (in industry) – 2 hours per week – “Preliminary Chinese for Business”. Course duration: 10 weeks. Total credit points - 10

Semester 2 of AY 2012/13:

- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Intermediate German for the Workplace”. Course duration: 12 weeks. Total credit points - 30
- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Intermediate and Advanced French for the Workplace”. Course duration: 12 weeks. Total credit points - 35
- Out centre teaching (in industry) – 4 hours per week (2 parallel groups) – “Preliminary French for Business”. Course duration: 15 weeks. Total credit points - 15
- Magee campus – 2 hours per week – “Intermediate English language” (for migrant workers). Course duration: 8 weeks. Total credit points - 20
- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Preliminary Chinese”. Course duration: 12 weeks. Total credit points - 15
- Out centre teaching (in industry) – 2 hours per week – “Preliminary Chinese for Business”. Course duration: 10 weeks. Total credit points - 10

Additional provision (semester 1 of AY 2013/14):

- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Preliminary Spanish for the Workplace”. Course duration: 12 weeks. Total credit points - 25
- Belfast campus – 2 hours per week – “Intermediate English language” (for migrant workers). Course duration: 8 weeks. Total credit points – 20
- Magee campus – 2 hours per week – “Advanced English language” (for migrant workers). Course duration: 8 weeks. Total credit points - 25

Each of these courses are accredited on the University’s Certificate of Personal and Professional Development

School of Irish Language and Literature

The School of Irish Language and Literature provides the following night provision for Irish language:

Diploma in Irish Language (part-time)

This is a two year course in which students take 3 modules (60 Credit Points in total) each year focusing on Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

Classes are held at each campus / outreach centre for 12 weeks in Semester 1 (starting last week in September) and 12 weeks in Semester 2 (starting last week in January).

1 University Campuses

- a University of Ulster, Magee Campus
Year 1 & Year 2 (Monday & Wednesday, 6.00-8.30pm)
- b University of Ulster, Belfast Campus
Year 1 & Year 2 (Monday & Wednesday, 6.00-8.30pm)

2 Outreach Centres

- a Cookstown, Burnavon Arts Centre
Year 1 (Monday & Wednesday, 6.00-8.30pm)
- * Inaugural year of this course – Years 1 & 2 will run here next year.
- b Southern Regional College, Newry (validated course)
Year 1 (Monday & Wednesday, 6.30-9.00pm)
Year 2 (Tuesday & Thursday, 6.30-9.00pm)

BA (Hons) Irish Language and Literature (part-time)

This is a five year course in which students take 4 modules (80 Credit Points in total) each year focusing on aspects on language proficiency and literary appreciation.

Classes are held at each campus / outreach centre for 12 weeks in Semester 1 (starting last week in September) and 12 weeks in Semester 2 (starting last week in January).

Successful completion of the Diploma in Irish Language enables students to enter Year 2 of this course.

- 1 University Campus
 - a University of Ulster, Belfast Campus
Years 2-5 (Tuesday, 5.30-9.30pm)
- 2 Outreach Centre
 - a Letterkenny Institute of Technology, Co. Donegal
Years 2-5 (Monday, 5.30-9.30pm)
 - * The Magee course is delivered at LYIT to accommodate students from Donegal Gaeltacht communities.

Queen's University Belfast

Queen's Open Learning division, within the School of Education, offers an extensive range of part-time evening classes in European language courses, as well as Arabic, Classical Greek, Latin and Mandarin Chinese (some 48 classes in total). Most courses are run over 20 weeks but the University also offers shorter Holiday courses – classes designed to give people the basics or the opportunity to refresh a language.

In addition, Queen's Language Centre runs subsidised evening classes for students through the 'Languages for Non Specialists' programme. Members of the public may enroll on these courses (paying the full cost) but they are designed for students. We currently hold 63 classes per week in 17 different languages. While seven of these classes are held on Wednesday afternoons, the remaining 56 classes are held between 5.00 p.m. and 9.00 p.m. Monday – Thursday.

Languages currently being taught through the Language Centre for the 2012-13 academic year are: Arabic, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Portuguese (Brazilian), Russian, Sign Language, Spanish and Swedish.

Training for Success

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many young people have taken part in Training for Success schemes since its inception.

(AQW 17073/11-15)

Dr Farry: Records show the following starts across academic years since the inception of the Training for Success (TfS) programme in September 2007:

2007/2008	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013
8,287	5,316	5,931	6,014	6,038	4,823

The 2007/2008 figure includes 4,243 employed apprentices but this provision was subsequently re-branded as the ApprenticeshipsNI programme in September 2008. Therefore, subsequent years exclude employed apprentices.

Programme-Led Apprenticeships (PLAs) were introduced under TfS in September 2009 in light of the difficulties being experienced by many young people in securing an apprenticeship through employment. Recruitment to pre-apprenticeships offered under TfS ceased following the introduction of PLAs.

The 2012/2013 figure shows starts up to the 26 November 2012.

Youth Unemployment

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many 16-18 year olds are currently unemployed and not taking part in training schemes.

(AQW 17074/11-15)

Dr Farry: Provision for 16-18 year olds includes school; further education, work-based training, an apprenticeship programme, and higher education. Some young people will also be in employment. Young people participating on training programmes and most other provision are ineligible to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) which is an unemployment-related benefit, and those young people who are aged under 18 and not on a training programme are only able to claim JSA in exceptional circumstances, such as where they are involuntarily living independently. There are therefore very few young people aged 16-17 claiming JSA and thus classified as unemployed.

The numbers of 16, 17, and 18 year olds claiming JSA in Northern Ireland in October 2012, and thus not availing of training or other provision, is shown in the table below.

Information is also available from NISRA from the Labour Force Survey for those 16-19 year olds not in education, full-time education, or training (NEET). The most recent estimate of the number in this category for Northern Ireland is 14,000. This relates to Quarter 3 2012, and is subject to sampling error.

Number of 16-18 year olds in Northern Ireland claiming Jobseeker's Allowance, October 2012

	Age			
	16	17	18	16-18
Number*	5	45	1,950	2,000

* all figures rounded to the nearest 5

Source: NOMIS, Office for National Statistics

Youth Unemployment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in addition to the event in conjunction with Invest NI, which was requested by the MP for East Londonderry, scheduled to be held in the Roe Valley Arts and Cultural Centre on Thursday 29 November 2012, what other measures are in place to assist young unemployed people in the Limavady area.

(AQW 17104/11-15)

Dr Farry: Addressing youth unemployment, in all areas of Northern Ireland including the Limavady area, is a priority.

Steps to Work is the Department's main return to work provision and in the Limavady area 276 young people are currently availing of this programme. This is a flexible programme which tailors provision to the individual's need with the aim of assisting participants to find and sustain employment.

The Department's Pathways to Work programme assists people with health conditions and disabilities move into employment and presently 44 young people in the Limavady area are involved in this programme.

In the period April to October 2012 my Department helped 190 young people move from welfare to work in Limavady (the area served by Limavady Jobs and Benefits Office). This is 12% above target for the area during this period. (The target for Limavady was 169).

My Department is also implementing the Youth Employment Scheme (YES) which was agreed by the Executive in March. The Scheme aims to help young people gain experience, acquire new skills and find employment and the Department is actively working with employers to secure as many opportunities, as quickly as possible across Northern Ireland. Some opportunities under YES are already available in Limavady and I expect more to be available in the coming months.

As part of the Jobs and Economy Initiative announced by the Executive, my Department has also recently implemented a new youth employment initiative within the Steps to Work programme called 'First Start'. Between October 2012 and March 2014, First Start will support 1,700 waged employment opportunities, each lasting a minimum of six months, for young people aged 18 to 24 who have been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for at least six months. First Start opportunities will be available in Limavady area in the coming months.

Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has any plans to review the Agency Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 to ensure that companies which provide agency staff cannot demand that employees waive their rights under section 5 to prevent that company applying parity of rights with the hiring company.

(AQW 17121/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that my Department will be carrying out a review of the operation of the 2011 Agency Workers Regulations commencing early in 2013. My officials are currently finalising terms of reference for a research project which will provide the evidence base for that review. It is intended that the research will cover the following issues: regulatory impact of the regulations; levels of awareness; the extent of compliance by agencies and hirers in providing access to the rights available under the regulations; and an assessment of whether there has been any under/over provision of rights.

Further Education Colleges

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the change of status of further education colleges to non-departmental public bodies; and whether this change will impact on his Department's policies.

(AQW 17126/11-15)

Dr Farry: Further education colleges became Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) with effect from April 2012. A formal project has been established to oversee this programme of change, and a Project Initiation Document (PID) has been produced and signed off by the Project Board, which includes representatives from the Department and the FE sector. The PID, which phases the implementation to minimise delivery risks to colleges and the Department, has been shared with the Department of Finance and Personnel.

There are five main project strands. These are budgeting and financial monitoring, colleges' statutory accounts, governance issues, FE operational policies, and legal issues. Of these, the only strand that had to be operational from April 2012 was the budgeting and financial monitoring strand.

The Department has worked closely with FE colleges' finance teams to establish processes through which colleges can comply with financial and budget monitoring procedures that are in line with Northern Ireland Civil Service requirements and timescales. The other strands of work are also progressing, but within slightly less challenging timescales.

While the move to NDPB status is a very complex and detailed programme of work, the change is, largely, technical in nature. However, as NDPBs, FE colleges will continue to be responsible for delivering further education provision in Northern Ireland in a way that meets the strategic direction that I and my Department set for the FE sector. This includes the services that colleges provide to individual learners and to employers. Therefore, I do not envisage the change to NDPB status having an impact on my Department's policies for the sector.

Finally, the Department does have the option of reviewing the situation, although any future decision to have our colleges classified as private organisations would require changes to the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, and a public consultation. However, I am minded to consult on this matter.

Further Education Colleges

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what checks and balances for further education colleges exist within his Department; and what steps he is taking to reduce the regulatory burden on these colleges.

(AQW 17127/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, which is the legislation under which further education colleges operate, provides for checks and balances between the college governing bodies and the Department.

There are a number of documents that determine the Department's oversight of further education colleges. In addition to the FE Order, these include Instruments and Articles of Government, the Financial Memorandum, the Code of Guidance on Audit, the Guide for Governors and the Code of Governance. Compliance monitoring is carried out by several bodies including the college internal auditors, external audit by the Northern Ireland Audit Office, and the Financial Audit and Support Team which is internal to the Department. In addition, the colleges are required to send various returns to the Department throughout the year including quarterly financial monitoring returns, quarterly consultancy returns, monthly budget monitoring returns, the annual report and financial statements, and internal and external audit reports.

Each college is also required, by legislation, to submit a College Development Plan to the Department which should contain details of the college's operations for the coming year including the courses to be provided and an estimate of expenditure. The Department will then meet formally with each college to agree the level of provision and the associated funding that will be provided.

All of the above is supplemented by departmental attendance at college governing body audit committee meetings and the review of minutes from all college governing body meetings by departmental officials.

Finally, the principal of each college is designated by the Department's Permanent Secretary as college Accounting Officer, with the responsibility for the effective stewardship of public funds, and an annual Accountability Review is held with each principal by the Permanent Secretary in his capacity as Accounting Officer to review their discharge of these responsibilities.

Many of the above arrangements reflect Public Accounts Committee recommendations contained within the report entitled 'Report on the Review of Financial Management in the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland and Governance Examination of Fermanagh FE College', published in June 2009, in which the Department was required to strengthen its oversight and scrutiny role of colleges. Therefore, currently I have no plans to reduce the level of scrutiny that the Department exercises over further education colleges, which has been developed to comply with best practice in governance and risk management. Furthermore, based upon a later decision by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) that the colleges of further education in Northern Ireland constituted public sector bodies, DFP determined that the colleges should be administered as Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) from April 2012. There is, therefore, no scope to reduce the present level of regulation on the colleges. The oversight detailed above is the minimum which would be considered appropriate in respect on an NDPB.

Further Education Colleges

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he will arrange for a formal acknowledgement of the level of skills being demonstrated at Further Education Colleges, and particularly the achievement of William Falconer of the North West Regional College, Limavady who recently won Gold in the Worldskills UK Final.

(AQW 17218/11-15)

Dr Farry: Northern Ireland's superb performance of achieving 16 medals at the Worldskills UK final in Birmingham, and 10 at the Skillbuild competition in Preston, is a true mark of excellence in our further education colleges and training organisations. This represented an outstanding achievement, not only for the young people themselves, but also for their families, employers and tutors who supported them throughout their training and the competitions. I had the pleasure of supporting our competitors at the Worldskills UK final, and have duly formally congratulated all our winners, from both events, in my recent press release of 27 November. I also intend to take part in a future celebration event for all our trainees, their families and tutors.

Wordskills Competition

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how he plans to build on the success of Northern Ireland as the region of the UK with the highest representation at the recent Wordskills competition in Birmingham.

(AQW 17219/11-15)

Dr Farry: This is a very significant and very highly commendable achievement for Northern Ireland and for all those involved. I am fully committed to building on this and previous significant Northern Ireland successes by continuing to support and develop high quality skills provision for our trainees, encouraging and supporting enhanced participation and achievement in skills competitions in Northern Ireland, supporting higher skilling and development for prospective WorldSkills competitors, and supporting competitors travelling to UK finals. Northern Ireland trainees should be given the best opportunity to compete at college and regional level, and exceptionally talented trainees should continue to progress to UK, European and World level both now and in future years.

Electricity Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail his Department's electricity costs in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 17293/11-15)

Dr Farry: The electricity costs for the Department for Employment and Learning in each of the last three financial years is detailed below:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£146,777	£124,292	£160,526

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Credit Unions

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans her Department has to increase the lending powers of Credit Unions.

(AQW 16868/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): My Department is currently in the process of scoping out new legislative provisions in relation to Northern Ireland Credit Unions with the aim of aligning Northern Ireland Credit Union legislation with that of GB. It is intended that these proposed legislative provisions will provide new opportunities and greater clarity for the Northern Ireland Credit Union sector and may include provisions to extend the lending powers of credit unions by permitting the admission of corporate bodies to membership.

The new Bill is scheduled for passage through the Assembly in the 2013/2014 legislative session. The draft policy proposals will be subject to the full statutory consultation process in Spring 2013 with the aim of introducing the Bill in the Assembly in late 2013.

Tourism: South Armagh

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what action her Department has taken to promote the tourism potential of the South Armagh area; and (ii) how much money has been put into the development of the area since May 2007, given its tourism potential and prime location as a tourist destination.

(AQW 16949/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) **Northern Ireland Tourist Board:**

The Northern Ireland Tourist Board's (NITB) remit is to promote the whole of Northern Ireland to both the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets, with a view to increasing visitor numbers and spend. Each year NITB undertakes a series of seasonal marketing campaigns in both markets. The huge variety of products, regions and events featured from throughout Northern Ireland are based on what motivates our key customer segments which have been identified through substantial research.

Tourism Ireland:

Tourism Ireland features South Armagh as part of its extensive global destination marketing programme. The aim is to raise awareness of, and interest in, this region as a holiday destination, focusing on a variety of things to see and do in the area.

For example, Tourism Ireland, working closely with NITB, invites overseas tour operators and journalists to visit Northern Ireland and experience for themselves the tourism product on offer with the aim that on their return, the tour operators will include Northern Ireland in their programmes and itineraries and journalists will generate positive publicity for Northern

Ireland through the articles they write. For example, in July, an Italian journalist travelled to South Armagh at Tourism Ireland's invitation.

Christian Heritage was identified as one of the five NITB signature projects and in this context, Tourism Ireland promotes the St Patricks Trail and the rich Christian heritage of Co. Armagh in key markets overseas.

Tourism Ireland includes information on South Armagh and St Patrick's Trail across its suite of 42 international websites in 14 different languages and this region is also featured in Tourism Ireland's e-zines and newsletters which are sent out regularly to top travel trade, media contacts and to consumers overseas. In March, ten Italian tour operators specialising in religious tourism visited Armagh to discover its rich Christian heritage.

(ii) Tourism Development Scheme:

Through the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) 2008 – 2011, NITB received 1 application from the South Armagh area. This application was unsuccessful. Through the 2011 – 2013 TDS scheme, 1 application has been received from the South Armagh area which is currently on the Reserve List.

Tourism Events Fund:

1 application was received since 2007 from the South Armagh area through the Events Fund. This application was successful although the applicant declined the offer.

Tourism Innovation Fund:

Over the same period NITB received no applications from the South Armagh area for support through the Tourism Innovation Fund.

Other:

In 2007-2008 through the International Fund for Ireland, NITB provided grant of £108,994 from total project costs of £206,723 to Armagh & Down Regional Tourism Partnership for marketing support for the wider Armagh/Down region which includes South Armagh.

More recently South Armagh has benefited from the St Patrick's Trail which runs through the area from Newry to Armagh. The Ring of Gullion area has also been identified by Newry & Mourne District Council as part of the overall Mournes Destination. The existing Mournes Destination Plan 2011 – 2013 is currently being revised with a view to a spring launch. NITB has also been supportive of the Mourne-Cooley-Gullion Geopark initiative currently underway in the area.

NITB commissioned a ni2012 herd of cows that travelled to towns and cities to showcase different regions. In August 2012 the herd was moved to Slieve Gullion Adventure Park. Updated statistics are currently being produced, but ni2012 Cow Parade activity has generated huge engagement and interaction on social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter. This led to the activity being viewed by up to 45,000 people within the first few weeks alone.

Invest NI: Newry

Ms Fearon asked Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what actions her Department and Invest NI have taken to encourage (i) investment; and (ii) job creation in the Newry area.

(AQW 16950/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The products, services and support available to both new and existing businesses of all sizes are extensively promoted through a range of channels, including advertising campaigns such as Boosting Business and Go For It, direct marketing, social media, events, workshops and seminars which cover the Newry area and all regions of Northern Ireland.

During the last 5 years, 1,003 offers of support were made to Invest NI Clients in the Newry & Mourne District Council area. This comprised of almost £40million of assistance, which contributed towards a total planned investment of £317million creating 2,803 new jobs.

In the last year 166 potential entrepreneurs from the Newry and Mourne District Council Area received advice from Invest NI's Newry Office. This culminated in 61 business start up plans being completed during the period. The new Regional Start Initiative has recently commenced in the area. This is focussed on encouraging potential entrepreneurs to produce a business plan as a key early step to starting a business.

In the last year, 231 people contacted Invest NI's Boosting Business helpline from the Newry and Mourne District Council area. From these, 70 referrals were made to other Invest NI teams for further action.

In addition, there are currently 10 Jobs Fund business investment projects which should lead to the creation of 64 new jobs, 31 of which have already been created.

Invest NI is keen to build on previous Foreign Direct Investment success and facilitated 13 potential investor visits to the Newry area in the last 4 years. During which these potential investors chose to visit the likes of Drumalane Mill, the Southern Regional College and existing investors within the same sector.

Invest NI has also been working with Newry and Mourne District Council and the South East Economic Development group of Councils (SEED) on a range of new business development initiatives under the LED Measure. ERDF and Invest NI support for these programmes totals over £1.3million, contributing towards a total cost of £1.9million.

Economy and Jobs Initiative

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how the £5.7 million for tourism announced in the Executive's Economy and Jobs initiative will be allocated; and (ii) whether any of the funding will be spent on tourism in the Glens.

(AQW 16959/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The £5.7 million capital secured through the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative will be allocated to shortlisted and reserve projects listed through the last Tourism Development Scheme open call. These projects will now proceed to the next stage of assessment. If successful in demonstrating economic viability and sustainability, value for money and ability to support the delivery of key tourism priorities, these projects will proceed subject to confirmation of the availability of sufficient match funding and relevant statutory approvals etc.
- (ii) I can confirm that 1 shortlisted project and 1 project on the reserve list from the East Antrim Constituency will proceed to Stage 2 assessment.

Offshore Energy

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to ensure that supply chain opportunities associated with the proposed development of off-shore energy can be utilised by local communities and businesses in South Down.

(AQW 16991/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The supply chain opportunities associated with the development of offshore energy projects in Northern Ireland coastal waters will evolve through the various stages of consenting, design, manufacture, installation and deployment over the next 8 years.

Invest NI has met with all developers in the Irish Sea region, including First Flight Wind, to present the capability of Northern Ireland companies to be part of their supply chains. Local companies are gaining success with, for example, Anglo North Irish Offshore Energy Services in Kilkeel, having recently secured new business with DONG Energy.

Invest NI is encouraging companies to engage with the developers as early as possible to understand the opportunities and how they can access the various contracts that will be available. First Flight Wind, for example, has already held public consultations with local communities through information seminars in Newcastle, Kilkeel, Ardglass, Portavogie and Downpatrick.

Invest NI is working pro-actively with local businesses to develop collaborations to access potential opportunities and is currently supporting a number of businesses in South Down to scope out the supply chain opportunities in the Offshore Energy Market. In addition Newry and Mourne Council have taken the lead on behalf of the South Eastern Economic Development council area to develop a programme, with assistance from Invest NI, to promote opportunities in renewable energy sector to local businesses in the area over the next three years.

Natural Gas

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 15974/11-15, for her Department's assessment of the pace of expansion of the gas distribution network, particularly for private housing estates in urban areas; and (ii) whether her Department has considered initiating measures which would bring more competition into the development of the gas distribution network.

(AQW 16996/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) There are two companies operating gas distribution networks within Northern Ireland, namely Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd in the Greater Belfast licensed area, and firmus energy in the "10 towns" licensed area outside Greater Belfast. The Utility Regulator has confirmed that the development of the gas distribution networks in each area is in accordance with the respective licences for each company, and the growth of the networks is as contained within the company's annual development plans which are agreed with the Regulator. The Utility Regulator advises that it will work closely with all licence holders and will consider carefully all options presented to expand or develop the existing areas, where it is economic to do so.
- (ii) firmus energy and Phoenix Natural Gas Ltd's gas distribution licenses are still in a period referred to as 'exclusivity' which for firmus will last until 2025 and Phoenix until 2016. This means that further development of the gas distribution networks by other interested parties is not feasible at this stage.

Regional Start

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how the Regional Start Initiative can help encourage economic recovery in South Down; and (ii) what mechanisms will be put in place to ensure that the initiative will be successful.

(AQW 17033/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland continues to offer a wide range of support to encourage the growth and development of the small business sector both in South Down and across Northern Ireland.

Regional Start (RS) is designed to support locally focused entrepreneurs into self employment. RS is set in the context of Invest NI's work with local Councils and the widest possible business base.

Following a successful tender competition, Enterprise Northern Ireland (ENI) has been awarded the contracts for the RS which commenced in October 2012. RS is focussed on encouraging potential entrepreneurs to produce a business plan as one of the key early steps to starting a business and moving into self employment. Invest NI's intention is that this business plan will provide a template for the new entrepreneur to plan and access sources of funds for the business.

The ENI target for business plan approvals for the Southern Region is 1,280 over the 2 year period of the contract. The performance of ENI in the delivery of RS against the agreed targets is subject to a monthly review with Invest NI.

In addition business start grants are available for people who are resident in Neighbourhood Renewal Areas (NRA) and for disadvantaged young people who are not in Employment, Education or Training (NEETS) who complete a business plan through RS and then go on to start a business. Both of these grants are administered by Invest NI.

Angling: Tourism

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what funding is available for investment in angling tourism; and (ii) whether her Department has given any consideration to the potential of enhancing angling tourism in South Down.

(AQW 17035/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), offers capital investment through the Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) and promotional & marketing support through the Tourism Events Fund. Both schemes are currently closed to applications.

(ii) **Tourism Ireland:**

Tourism Ireland promotes angling tourism in key markets overseas, particularly in markets such as GB, Germany and the Netherlands, through major angling fairs such as VISMA, Rotterdam, Jagen & Fischen, Augsburg, Utrecht Angling Fair, "The Big One" in GB and Angeln in Duisberg. Should angling providers be interested in participating in overseas promotions with Tourism Ireland, we would suggest that they visit and register on <http://www.tourismireland.com/industryopportunities.html>

Northern Ireland Tourist Board:

NITB is responsible for promoting Northern Ireland to the domestic and Republic of Ireland markets. Within these markets angling has not been designated as a priority. The majority of domestic anglers are members of angling clubs and do not require information from NITB.

Although demand has decreased, angling remains an important product and NITB is working closely with destinations in developing plans to optimise their tourism potential and many of these (e.g. Fermanagh) have identified that angling is a key component of their tourism offering.

NITB works closely with Tourism Ireland to host press trips for angling journalists and liaises with the many government agencies that have responsibility for angling, to ensure that the key links are available on www.discovernorthernireland.com/angling to provide the prospective angler with relevant accurate information. NITB can offer support in promoting events and activities that are 'tourism focused' on www.discovernorthernireland.com.

My Department is also working with the World Police and Fire Games Company to promote Northern Ireland tourism to the competitors and spectators of the Games, which include freshwater and sea angling.

NITB liaises with Department of Culture and Leisure (DCAL) and The Loughs Agency who have direct responsibility for Northern Ireland's angling product.

Tourism Development Scheme

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how local people can benefit from the Tourism Development Scheme; (ii) whether additional funding will be made available in 2012/13 and 2013/14; and (iii) whether the scheme is still open to new applicants.

(AQW 17036/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

(i) The visitor economy directly supports 5.6% of Northern Ireland's total workforce or 1 in 18 jobs and sustains 40,000 jobs. These people are employed in every constituency and at every skill level. The Northern Ireland Executive has announced an extra £5.7million of funding will go to the Tourism Development Scheme which could deliver total investment of over £27.5million. It is estimated that this additional investment will support over 450 jobs in

the construction phase and create or sustain 50 tourism jobs once complete. Local people can also benefit from improvements made to visitor attractions in Northern Ireland through the Tourism Development Scheme.

- (ii) Additional budget has now been made available from the Northern Ireland Executive through the Economy and Jobs Initiative. This availability of additional financial assistance for both the 2013-14 and 2014-15 financial years will enable shortlisted projects and those on the reserve list to proceed to the next stage of assessment. If successful in demonstrating economic viability and sustainability, value for money and ability to support the delivery of key tourism priorities, these projects will proceed subject to confirmation of the availability of sufficient match funding and relevant statutory approvals etc.

Those affected projects on both the shortlist and reserve lists have been issued with letters requesting an urgent project update in 2 respects (i) confirmation of whether they wish to proceed with their application; and (ii) request for completion of a business plan for their proposed project. Those project promoters who submit relevant information as requested will be progressed as soon as possible to full economic appraisal.

- (iii) The most recent call for Tourism Development Scheme applications closed for new applicants on 6 January 2012. There are no current plans to open the scheme for new applicants.

G8 Summit

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she intends to meet the potential demands on the hospitality sector, and other sectors, arising from the G8 Summit being held in Enniskillen.

(AQW 17057/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The G8 Summit will give the tourism industry here another immense opportunity to shine. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Tourism Ireland Limited will work to support the industry in the area and to ensure we maximise the opportunity to promote Fermanagh and Northern Ireland as a world class destination, not only to world leaders but also to the international media.

Invest NI will continue to engage with and support businesses to ensure they remain competitive and can handle the expected demand for the services of the sector before and during the G8 meeting. Informal discussions have already been held with a number of accommodation businesses in the area in order to assess the state of preparation of businesses in advance of the visit.

My Department has already engaged with telecoms providers to explore the available options for improving services at the Lough Erne Resort.

It is important to ensure that Northern Ireland's economy benefits from the G8 Summit. We will work closely with the G8 organisers so that we rise to the challenge.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what plans she has to work with the Minister of Finance and Personnel to secure more procurement contracts for small and medium-sized businesses.

(AQW 17058/11-15)

Mrs Foster: DETI carries out its procurement activities through a Service Level Agreement with Central Procurement Directorate (CPD), which is a Centre of Procurement Expertise. CPD is a Directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel.

Local small and medium sized businesses win a significant portion of public sector contracts. In 2010- 2011 67% of contracts awarded by Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) and Centres of Procurement Expertise went to local SMEs. For construction contracts this figure was higher at 91%.

The Procurement Board has made substantial progress in simplifying procurement processes for contracts below the EU thresholds. This will make it easier for SMEs to tender for business.

CPD regularly attends Meet the Buyer events to explain to SMEs how to tender for public contracts. In the past 5 years CPD has attended 63 events attended by over 4,000 representatives from local firms.

Arrangements have also been put in place for Invest NI to follow up with successful contractors where there is potential for export opportunities.

Energy Costs

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she is taking to encourage a reduction in energy costs, particularly small and medium-sized businesses that are struggling with overheads in the current economic climate.

(AQW 17059/11-15)

Mrs Foster: While my Department has no direct role in the setting of energy prices, it works with the Utility Regulator given its important role in regulation of the electricity and natural gas industries, to develop market conditions which can put downward pressure on energy prices.

From October 2012, Power NI reduced electricity prices across Northern Ireland by 14.1% for the domestic and smaller business sector with competitors adjusting their prices accordingly, and following an 8.5% reduction in natural gas prices in Greater Belfast in April 2012, both Airtricity Gas Supply and firmus energy maintained their existing prices following a tariff review last Autumn.

The retail electricity market is fully open to competition across Northern Ireland as is the natural gas market in Greater Belfast. The gas market in the "10 towns" licensed area outside Greater Belfast opened in October 2012 for larger energy users and will be open to supply competition for small and medium size business users and domestic consumers from April 2015. A number of electricity and natural gas suppliers serve the business sector in Northern Ireland and businesses are encouraged to seek the best deals available from competing energy supply companies.

On 1 November 2012, I launched the Northern Ireland Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) which provides financial assistance for businesses, and other organisations that wish to install renewable heating technologies. Those installing renewable heat technologies could expect to receive incentive payments for up to twenty years which will offset ongoing energy costs.

In addition, Invest NI provides advice and financial assistance to companies wishing to replace existing equipment with more energy efficient or renewable alternatives.

Photovoltaic Panels

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department intends to introduce a new grant scheme for photovoltaic panels.
(AQW 17162/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no plans for my Department to introduce a grant scheme for solar photovoltaic (PV) panels. Instead, solar PV panels are incentivised by the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation which provides a revenue stream for the renewable electricity generated in the form of Renewables Obligation Certificates (ROCs) which can be sold to electricity suppliers.

Farming: Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment at what level of risk would the enforcing authorities perceive the farming sector to be and how is this assessed.
(AQW 17214/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Using a five year average (2007-2012) of the Fatal Accident Incidence Rate (number of deaths per 100,000 at risk) it can be seen from the table below that farming is currently the highest risk sector in Northern Ireland.

Sector	Fatal Accident Incidence Rate (Per 100,000 at risk)
Agriculture	11.7
Manufacturing & Quarrying	4
Construction	2.5
All Northern Ireland Employment	0.8

However it should be noted that the overall trend is upward, with the rate for the farming sector in 2011/12 reaching 17.1.

Internationally, Northern Ireland performs similarly or better than some other countries. The equivalent five-year average rates (2007-2012) were 11.1 in Great Britain and 31 in the Republic of Ireland, while the pan European rate was approximately 12 and that in the USA was around 30.

Farming: Health and Safety

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what research has been carried out on barriers to the uptake of health and safety messages for the farming community.
(AQW 17254/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As part of a considerable body of general research into farm safety that has been carried out in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Republic of Ireland and Europe, some analysis of the barriers to the uptake of safety messages has already been undertaken.

In addition, HSENI has recently commissioned research, using focus groups representing farmers and the wider farming community, which is currently being conducted. This research is designed to discover the most effective routes to influence the farming community and identify any perceived barriers to this communication.

Electricity: Transmission Capacity

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the process used by Power NI to allocate spare transmission capacity to providers of renewable energy.

(AQW 17400/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Power NI is an electricity supply company and has no role in the allocation of transmission capacity. The process for the allocation of firm access to the transmission system is presently being developed by NIE and System Operators Northern Ireland and will be the subject of a forthcoming consultation and subsequent approval by the Utility Regulator. My Department is not involved in this process.

Electricity: Transmission Capacity

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what assessment has been made of the impact that a lack of transmission capacity has on (i) meeting renewable energy targets; and (ii) business viability.

(AQW 17401/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Transmission capacity is a matter for industry, not my Department. Provision is made under the Price Control process between NIE Transmission & Distribution and the Utility Regulator for agreement of funding requirements to upgrade the network to support integration of electricity generated through renewable sources in support of Northern Ireland Executive targets.

Electricity: Transmission Capacity

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any discussions she has had with Power NI in the last twelve months about having a more open, equitable and transparent system of allocating spare transmission capacity.

(AQW 17402/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Power NI, as a supply company, has no role in allocation of transmission capacity. I have had no discussions with Power NI or any other party about the process of allocating spare transmission capacity. This is a matter for discussion between the Utility Regulator in association with NIE Transmission & Distribution and System Operators Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of (i) his Department's elements criteria used to determine public contract tenders for construction; and (ii) whether the criteria, such as turnover thresholds, might prohibit small-to-medium sized local businesses from making applications,

(AQW 13164/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) in the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) is responsible for developing and establishing the policy framework and best practice public procurement within which the wider public sector operates.

Construction contracts for my Department are awarded through CPD and therefore comply with public procurement policy thereby ensuring that the appropriate criteria and financial thresholds are adopted and small and medium size businesses are not disadvantaged.

I believe that small and medium size businesses could benefit from the untapped potential of those currently unemployed through the provision of social clauses in public procurement contracts. Therefore, I have introduced new arrangements in the Department which require provision of social clauses for all proposed construction contracts with a labour value over £500k. The Department is also exploring opportunities to maximise the use of social clauses below this threshold across all Departmental procurement.

In July I introduced the Local Government Best Value (Exclusion of Non-commercial Considerations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012, removing certain restrictions which have previously prevented district councils from including social clauses in their public supply and works contracts. In bringing this amended legislation to the Assembly, I encouraged all councils to embed the use of social clauses in their contracts to enhance the number of work opportunities. In addition, to embed wider local economic, social and environmental benefits into procurement strategies the Department recently delivered a procurement workshop for council staff.

Also, recognising the barriers faced by those currently unemployed, I have increased the scope for training opportunities within DOE on a number of fronts, including provision of 180 Steps to Work placements. To date, 106 people have taken up the Steps to Work opportunity and I continue to press for the full roll out of the initiative.

The Department is currently working with the Gerry Rogan Initiative Trust and Opportunity Youth to open up opportunities for young people who are not in education, employment or training. As a further measure the Department has agreed to facilitate

9 Programme-Led Apprenticeships placements and has made provision for 14 placements in the Graduate Acceleration Programme, facilitated six undergraduate placements and three specialist skills bursary placements.

It is my ambition to work on green procurement, borrowing from models in other jurisdictions which will also create opportunities for small and medium sized businesses.

Planning Service: Gold Mining at Cavanacaw

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of the Environment whether there will be any disciplinary action taken in light of the failings of the Planning Service in regards to the gold mining at Cavanacaw near Omagh.

(AQW 14477/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As I have already indicated I have instructed senior officials to focus on ensuring that lessons are learnt from the mistakes made in the processing of the enforcement case and the subsequent planning applications where the permissions have been set aside by the Court.

In my previous answer (AQW 14476/11-5) I outlined the necessary actions I consider to be essential to deal with internal processing issues and the proper interpretation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations. I asked that this be taken forward as a matter of urgency.

PPS 21: 10-year Rule

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the 10 year rule under PPS21 for additional applications; and what impact this has had on rural areas and communities.

(AQW 16520/11-15)

Mr Attwood: PPS 21 offers considerable development opportunities for people wishing to live in the countryside by providing for a dwelling on a farm; replacement dwellings; the conversion and re-use of non-residential buildings as dwellings; new buildings within an existing cluster or ribbon of buildings; social and affordable housing schemes; development within designated Dispersed Rural Communities; and a dwelling to meet compelling personal or domestic circumstances.

Evidence to date demonstrates that the current rural policy is operating generally effectively and there has been considerable take up on the opportunity to obtain a dwelling on a farm. Since the adoption of PPS21 in June 2010 there have been 5,173 applications received for new single rural dwellings (excluding replacement dwellings) under PPS21 over the 2 year period to June 2012 with 4,806 applications approved.

I am carrying out a review of the operation of PPS21 and intend to make a statement to the Assembly shortly on the outcome of this review.

Planning: Permitted Development Rights

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the timeframe for changes to permitted development rights.

(AQW 16600/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am working on a number of fronts to reform and remodel the planning system so that it supports the future economic and social development needs of all users in Northern Ireland. An important part of that work involves the introduction of new and revised permitted development rights.

This will include the introduction of new permitted development rights for non-domestic micro-renewable technologies such as solar panels and biomass boiler housing as well as changes to telecomms PD, utilities (Railway undertakings, Dock, Pier, Harbour or Water Transport undertakings, Electricity Undertakings, Post Office, Water and Sewerage Undertakings) and street market trading. The timeframe is to proceed with the necessary work to amend subordinate legislation through the Assembly process and introduce the new PD rights in early 2013. Following that there will be a rolling programme of new and revised permitted development rights introduced throughout 2013 and beyond for a range of further land uses including agricultural buildings and Anaerobic Digestion plant (consultation issued), development ancillary to mines and quarries and electric car charging points.

These measures are in addition to new and extended PD rights introduced earlier this year for industry and warehouse development, shops, financial and professional services, office premises, schools, colleges, universities and hospitals and for the demolition of buildings.

During 2011 the scope of PD rights were extended for householder extensions which made it easier for people to undertake minor works to extend their homes. New PD rights were also brought into operation for use of land as a caravan site and for domestic microgeneration equipment including solar panels, ground and water source heat pumps and solid biomass fuel storage.

New PD rights are a further attempt to simplify the planning process and assist economic development. At the same time, research is being undertaken to identify where other opportunities for PD reform may exist.

Planning: Revised Fees

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the timescale for the introduction of the revised planning fees.
(AQW 16602/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The review of planning fees and funding is a two phase project, the first phase of which was completed in April 2011. This phase introduced a number of measures to address areas of under recovery and cross subsidisation in the existing fees structure. The second phase is currently being progressed and a consultation on the 1st stage of proposals emerging from this work will issue for an 8 week consultation period later this month. Proposals include:

- Cutting substantially the fee to renew a planning permission;
- Removing the entire fee for non-profit making organisations (such organisations at present pay a concessionary fee);
- Fixing the anomaly for applications for two or more dwellings whereby the fee is increased but capped
- Revising the fee for mixed use applications to more accurately reflect the work in assessing them;
- Removing the exemption for planning applications which are submitted after a Certificate of Lawful Use/Development application; and
- Introducing a new method of calculating fees for Minerals, Gas and Waste developments to help more accurately reflect the site area.

It is intended that these proposed changes will help to provide further clarity, ensure fee levels are more proportionate to the work involved in processing applications and help in part to alleviate the financial burden on developers affected by the economic downturn.

The second phase of the review will also look at more fundamental long term changes to how the planning system is funded, with the aim of developing a robust and fit for purpose system, to secure sustainability of the planning system in preparation of the transfer of the function to local government.

It is hoped that, following the consultation on the aforementioned proposals, changes to the legislation can be introduced in spring 2013. It is expected that the review in its entirety will be completed by late 2013.

Planning: Application Processing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what action he is taking to ensure that there is consistency in the time taken to process planning applications in each division.
(AQW 16673/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department is committed to providing an effective and efficient planning system. The evidence is that, following a range of interventions, the planning process is improving but there is more work to do to make the planning system fully fit for its purpose of managing applications for sustainable development.

The Department has experienced very considerable change over the last 2 years. Staffing levels have reduced substantially in order to operate within available budgets and this redeployment exercise impacted on performance and an imbalance in staffing across the Area office network and within Headquarter teams. As a result further redeployment of remaining staff has taken place to redress any imbalances and improve consistency in the time taken to process applications.

Performance within each area office is carefully monitored and Area Planning Managers report monthly on how each area office is performing against the ambitious targets that I have set for 2012-13 for processing of planning applications.

A Performance Action Plan has also been put in place in order to improve and manage performance. This Action Plan identifies a number of initiatives and allows for the monitoring and active management of cases within agreed timescales.

I will continue to work with key stakeholders to ensure that planning delivers in an efficient and timely manner and continue to monitor performance to ensure consistency across the area office network.

Ministerial Meeting: Invitation

Mr Swann asked the Minister of the Environment when his Department was first informed of his invitation to attend a Ministerial event in Dublin on the evening of 14 November 2012.
(AQW 16795/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) was aware that ministerial diaries can change - and need to change – depending on changed circumstances and events. Indeed, the UFU were advised of this in relation to the proposed North Antrim meeting.

At the time of that event, I was meeting with people in Belfast, including officials from the Irish Government. The UFU were informed the week before the North Antrim event of the change in my diary.

I make no apology that I did not attend the UFU event. A meeting in Belfast that discussed the security situation, given recent events, was clearly a greater priority. I would be surprised if anyone could think otherwise and that includes the UFU.

Local Government: Transfer of Functions

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the timetable for the Transfer of Functions Programme, including the powers which are to transfer, the date of transfer and whether the transfer of functions to Local Government will be cost neutral.

(AQW 16821/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Executive has committed to the transfer of functions and their associated powers from central government to local government on 1st April 2015. The Executive has further committed that the functions which will transfer from government departments to local government should be fit for purpose, sufficiently resourced and be cost neutral to the ratepayer at the point of transfer. That has not changed.

I will shortly put a paper to the Executive seeking final agreement on the overall package of functions to be transferred. This follows my engagement with Ministerial colleagues on the content of the package, which the Executive agreed should be refreshed.

Local Government: Lisburn and Castlereagh Councils

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether the assets, including directly and indirectly employed staff, transferring to Belfast from the existing Lisburn and Castlereagh Council areas, will transfer in full, as well as any liabilities attached.

(AQW 16876/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The dissolution of the 26 councils, and the creation of the 11 new councils in 2015, including Lisburn / Castlereagh, will require the transfer of legal title of the assets, along with legal responsibilities for liabilities, from the current to successor councils.

The Department will make provision in the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill for the creation of schemes to transfer the designated assets and liabilities. Subject to the Executive's agreement, I intend to introduce the Bill to the Assembly in the New Year.

In parallel with this, a group of senior local and central government officers has been established to develop the detail of these transfer schemes and related arrangements for managing the transfer of assets and liabilities from existing councils (and, where appropriate, Government Departments) to the new councils. The group is due to present its findings and recommendations to the Regional Transition Committee, which I chair, by the end of March 2013.

The Committee will carefully consider the group's recommendations and related guidance.

Turning to the issue of council staff, those employed by the existing councils will ultimately be transferring to one of the new 11 councils. They will do so in line with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) legislation (TUPE) and the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill will include a Scheme of Transfer.

Human resource issues particular to local government reform are consulted on and negotiated through the Local Government Reform Joint Forum set up for this purpose. The Forum in turn must take cognisance of the Guiding Principles adopted by the Executive and which apply to staff affected by RPA reorganisation. The fundamental aims of the Principles are to ensure the smooth transfer of affected staff to their new employers, fair treatment and to minimise the risk of compulsory redundancy.

Vacancy Controls negotiated through the Forum are already in place to help protect staff and to prepare the way for transfer. The Forum will continue to work with the partnership based implementation arrangements I have put in place. Issues such as the new council structures and staffing needs form part of the detailed work programme underway.

I expect that in most cases, the transfer of the assets, liabilities and staff may not be problematic, particularly where the transfers are within council clusters. I do, however, appreciate that in others, including transfers between Lisburn, Castlereagh and Belfast, there may be specific issues to address.

I believe that these will be best addressed through discussions and negotiations between the councils involved.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the current position in relation to the Review of Public Administration funding bid to the Executive and the extent of the overall funding programmes.

(AQW 16878/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As you are aware, my bid in the June Monitoring Round for £2.3 million to support local government reform in the current financial year was unsuccessful, as was the further bid I made in October Monitoring, and I have made my disappointment at the outcome.

Since then, I have returned to this issue and have expanded my bid for funding up to April 2015 when the new Councils will take on their full responsibilities. I have been actively pursuing this issue in discussions and correspondence with Minister Wilson and other Executive colleagues and in so doing have made it clear that I:-

- acknowledge that it is reasonable to expect local government to contribute to the cost of reform initiatives from which they will ultimately benefit;

- consider, however, that there are key transition workstreams vital to successful delivery of reform which should be funded by the Executive which are inescapable and have no cash releasing benefits for the sector;
- have identified associated transition costs, in the order of tens of millions of pounds, over the 2012-13 to 2014-15 period; and
- would be presenting a paper to the Executive on this issue.

I have prepared a draft Executive paper and issued it to Ministers. This paper has also been considered by Ministers at the Budget Review Group meeting, on 27 September 2012, chaired by the First Minister and deputy First Minister.

At that meeting, there was general acceptance that the Executive should consider how it could support local government in financing the overall reform programme. Indeed, the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) was tasked with exploring all possible options, including the direct funding proposals set out in my draft Executive paper, along with borrowing mechanisms including soft loans, costing these and outlining the consequences. DFP has developed a paper setting out these options for the Executive.

My draft paper, seeking the Executive's agreement to fund the transition work streams, has been revised to take account of Ministerial discussions and has been submitted to the First Minister and deputy First Minister with a request that it be considered quickly by the Executive. I strongly believe there is a need for certainty on RPA funding. This includes upfront monies and other means of helping the funding of RPA. The councils, however, have a responsibility, including through the ICE programme, which needs accelerated.

Review of Public Administration

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment, in relation to the overall programme of the Review of Public Administration and the necessity to consider staffing terms and conditions, whether the application of TUPE will apply; and whether his Department has taken legal advice on this matter.

(AQW 16879/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The overall Review of Public Administration (RPA) is an Executive Programme launched in 2002 and the Executive agreed the general approach to be taken in terms of the impacts on staff in each of the RPA affected areas. The Executive based its decision on all the available advice, including legal advice, at that time. RPA affected staff have been given TUPE (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations)-type protections even though RPA does not strictly fall within that legislation.

In addition, the Executive adopted a set of Guiding Principles recommended by the Public Service Commission and agreed with the Trade Unions. The fundamental aims are to protect staff from compulsory redundancy, in so far as is possible, and to ensure their fair treatment.

In developing the Guiding Principles, the Commission was obliged to take the statutory obligations into account. The Guiding Principles make reference to TUPE and with the Executive commitment underpin the negotiations around the terms and conditions for staff in all sectors affected by RPA. This includes the local government reform element of RPA.

Planning: Three Rivers Mixed-use Development

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of the Environment when he will make a decision on the Three Rivers mixed-use development planning application for the Lifford Road, Strabane.

(AQW 16891/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The member will know of how firmly I have been managing Article 31 applications. Between now and Christmas, there will be further evidence of this.

There are a number of planning issues to be considered before a recommendation can be made on the proposals including the principle of development (the site lies outside the Strabane settlement limit), the retail impact from the proposed foodstore on Strabane town centre and the surrounding area, traffic and transport impacts (including potential implications for the future upgrade of the A5), flood risk (the site lies within the floodplains of the Mourne, Finn and Foyle rivers) and the ecological impacts.

An Addendum to the Environmental Statement was received on 29th June 2012 and the re-consultation, re-advertisement and re-neighbour notification procedures were carried out in accordance with the EIA Regulations.

Strabane District Council and Donegal County Council were also re-consulted due to the transboundary nature of the application. Strabane District Council provided a corporate response on 9th October 2012 which indicated qualified support for the proposal subject to a number of planning conditions which included the completion of Phase 1 of the overall development, within clearly defined timescales and in advance of the commercial retail section.

Donegal County Council has yet to provide a corporate response. A meeting was arranged for Friday 23rd November 2012 between the Council and Planning to discuss the proposal.

The Department is therefore not yet in a position to make a determination as the fundamental issues relating to the principle of development and the recently submitted consultation responses still have to be considered fully.

Planning Officer: Dismissal

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 16166/11-15, what circumstances led to the dismissal of the planning officer who worked in the enforcement section in Rathkeltair House; and whether any criminal charges were brought.

(AQW 16908/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am aware of the case. However, this is an internal disciplinary matter between the Department and the individual member of staff which has not yet concluded. The Department does not discuss internal disciplinary matters and to do so would be a breach of the individual's rights under the Data Protection Act.

I can assure the member that where an allegation is made against a member of staff, it will be properly investigated and any appropriate action will be taken.

Red Squirrel Population

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of the Environment what measures his Department has put in place to protect and enhance the red squirrel population in South Down.

(AQW 16914/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The red squirrel population is in decline across the UK and Ireland. The main factors causing this decline are habitat loss, competition from non native grey squirrels and squirrel pox disease.

To address these concerns, my Department published a Northern Ireland Species Action Plan for red squirrels in 2000. This was superseded in 2008, when, in conjunction with the National Parks and Wildlife Service, my department published the All Ireland Species Action Plan for Red Squirrels.

The Northern Ireland Squirrel Forum was formed to progress actions contained within these plans and brings together statutory and non-statutory organisations, as well as representatives of country parks and local volunteer organisations dedicated to protecting the red squirrel in Northern Ireland. My Department chair the Forum, and has also helped create, and subsequently supports a number of local squirrel groups.

These groups focus on local squirrel issues, undertake a wide range of actions on the ground and provide regular updates to the Forum. There are currently eight groups active within Northern Ireland, two of which operate in the South Down area; i.e. Tollymore Forest Park and the Ring of Gullion ANOB.

The first record of squirrel pox in Ireland was in Tollymore Forest Park in March 2011. My Department organised an emergency response to this discovery and provided direction and support to both Forest Service and Tollymore squirrel group members in the aftermath of the outbreak. This included the purchase and supply of motion sensor field cameras. We are currently considering a grant application to undertake a full baseline survey of the squirrel population in the area.

In addition, my Department has recently supplied squirrel traps to the Mourne Heritage Trust. The Trust is using volunteers to try and clear grey squirrels from several areas in the eastern Mournes that historically held healthy red squirrel populations.

Peatland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to work with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to establish a taskforce to draft a comprehensive peatland policy.

(AQW 16916/11-15)

Mr Attwood: We are working closely with colleagues in DARD on peatland conservation e.g. on the review Common Agricultural Policy and the management of designated nature conservation sites.

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy is currently under review and will require Government to address the restoration of peatlands for biodiversity, the carbon stores they hold and other ecosystem services. This will include the consideration of the need for a comprehensive peatland policy for Northern Ireland.

Peatland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what funding he will make available for peatland restoration.

(AQW 16917/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The funding of peatland restoration is undertaken through a range of actions both within and outside Government.

Within the Department of the Environment, I am funding peatland restoration through designated site management and grant-aid. Through these mechanisms I am providing significant resources which will benefit blanket bogs, lowland raised bogs and other peatland habitats.

The Northern Ireland Environment Agency has recently committed to funding research on the distribution and condition of peatland. These will help to prioritise further peatland restoration work. In addition, work on landscape-scale peatland restoration will continue to be grant-aided.

Agricultural policies and funding have a major impact on the condition and restoration of peatlands. Officials within my Department will continue work closely with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that there are funding opportunities for peatland restoration through the implementation CAP reform.

Peatland

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to commission research into the value of peatland restoration.

(AQW 16918/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Two related research projects are being undertaken by NIEA:

- **Economic value of peatlands:** This project aims to value ecosystem services provided by peat habitats throughout Northern Ireland. This proposal is to value ecosystem services arising from conservation of important habitats and should provide a benchmark study on the relative magnitude of the market values, and non-market values including non use values for each element of a list of ecosystem services.
- **Northern Ireland peatland inventory:** pilot study. The first stage of a new peatland inventory for Northern Ireland is currently being commissioned. It is intended that this will help inform peatland conservation and restoration activities across Northern Ireland.

National Parks

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the opposition from residents, whether he will withdraw any proposals for a national park in the Causeway Coast and the Glens of Antrim.

(AQW 16919/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am taking stock in relation to national parks, listening to those who are for and against, as well as the undecided. I am holding a series of private meetings with a wide range of people and organisations to hear the full range of views. Indeed, although I was unable to attend their recent meeting in Ballycastle, I met the Ulster Farmers' Union in early December.

At the heart of the issue is simply this: our heritage – built and natural – adds considerably to the quality of our lives and offers employment and tourism opportunities for the future. Unemployment is growing, and after welfare reform there may be 20,000 more people officially out of work. The challenge to all of us is this: what more can we do to help people who are out of work into work and creating jobs? National parks may be one way to do so, but not a park with the restrictions of which some people mistakenly talk.

I will therefore continue to meet with interested parties, and consider all that they have to say, before taking a decision on the most appropriate way forward.

My model is 'designation without new regulation'! This is a threat to no-one, but an opportunity for many. Everyone – including MLAs – have an obligation to work out how, when we will have 85,000 unemployed after welfare change, how we create jobs and hope for people in our rural areas.

Animal Carcasses: Illegal Dumping

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 14741/11-15, whether the councils in border areas are affected by the higher incidences of the illegal dumping of animal carcasses.

(AQW 16921/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Figures obtained from District Councils do indicate that Councils with a southern border into the Republic of Ireland, i.e. Armagh, Fermanagh, and Newry and Mourne, have had a considerably higher number of animal carcasses dumped than other areas – 156, 147 and 158 respectively – over the past three years. The Councils with a Donegal-facing border, Derry City, Omagh and Strabane, have been affected to a much lesser extent.

Lisburn: City Status

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether Lisburn City Council will maintain its city status under the introduction of any new proposed legislation.

(AQW 17009/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am currently developing proposals for legislation which will enable all new councils, which have a city within the boundary of their new local government district, to opt to become a city council should they resolve to do so. I can confirm that the council for the new Lisburn and Castlereagh local government district will have this option available to it, due to Lisburn's city status.

Primary powers in relation to the status of councils will be included in the Local Government (Reorganisation) Bill. The Bill will be presented to the Assembly for scrutiny in early 2013.

Public Meeting: Attendance

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment why he did not attend the public meeting in Ballycastle on 14 November 2012 to discuss the proposal of a National Park for the area, as previously arranged.

(AQW 17022/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) was aware that ministerial diaries can change – and need to change – depending on changed circumstances and events. Indeed, the UFU were advised of this in relation to the proposed North Antrim meeting.

At the time of that event, I was meeting with people in Belfast, including officials from the Irish Government. The UFU were informed the week before the North Antrim event of the change in my diary.

I make no apology that I did not attend the UFU event. A meeting in Belfast that discussed the security situation, given recent events, was clearly a greater priority. I would be surprised if anyone could think otherwise and that includes the UFU.

Local Government: Jobs

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment how many jobs he anticipates may be lost as a result of the reform of Local Government.

(AQW 17070/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Executive's decision to reduce the number of councils to 11 will almost certainly mean a need for fewer staff than are employed by the existing 26 councils.

I am conscious of and wish to minimise the potential impacts on those likely to be affected, and this is being taken fully on board as preparations progress. Central to this is the Local Government Reform Joint Forum which was set up to ensure that the impacts upon affected staff are thoroughly considered and negotiated between staff representative organisations and employing authorities. The work of the Joint Forum is underpinned by the commitment to act in the best interests of the affected staff, according to guiding principles agreed by the Executive. A fundamental aspect of these principles is to make every effort to avoid compulsory redundancies.

Planning: Permitted Development Rights

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of the Environment what steps he will take to ensure that neighbours to properties, whose owners want to make changes, are protected following the revision of Permitted Development Rights.

(AQW 17071/11-15)

Mr Attwood: All of the changes to permitted development rights that I have introduced have been subject to appropriate checks and balances tailored to the scale and nature of the proposed permitted development and are designed to address potential adverse impacts on neighbours and the environment. These include constraints in relation to the proximity of a proposed development to property boundaries together with height and ground area restrictions.

I have also introduced limitations to afford additional protection in sensitive areas such as conservation areas, areas of special scientific interest, world heritage sites and sites of archaeological interest. I will continue to apply such safeguards to any future permitted development changes to protect neighbours and to ensure that development is of an appropriate scale and character.

Local Government: Senior Posts

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment whether he will ensure that future chief executive and senior director posts for the new 11 councils will be open to both people currently working within the local government sector and those in other areas of employment.

(AQO 2919/11-15)

Mr Attwood: No final decision has been taken on the method of appointing the Chief Executives of the new 11 Councils. Discussions regarding the underlying principles and timings for competitions for senior staff are being taken forward within the implementation structures I have established. I expect to receive recommendations shortly and to settle the issue quickly. I am taking legal advice on the matter to ensure that the course I adopt - and I have a clear view on what should be the right course - is legally robust and proper.

Wind Turbines

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the reasons for the delay in processing planning applications for individual wind turbines in the North West area.

(AQO 2924/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Renewables is, arguably, Ireland's greatest economic opportunity. Research and development, innovation, construction service hubs and electricity self-sufficiency are parts of the opportunity.

The vast majority of turbine applications (still under consideration) are awaiting further information from the applicant or agent in relation to amendments; bat surveys; noise reports; roads details; or are awaiting consultee responses.

I have made a priority that the full range of renewable applications are handled with good speed. To do so, training has been rolled out, accountability at a local and senior level is being embedded, close liaison with the renewable industry is deepening, more decisions are being made and the decision rate is improving.

Many applications require further information from the applicant or agent, both of whom need to ensure that the fullest information is provided. That said, in the April 2011- June 2012 period, 377 approvals and 85 refusals were issued for wind turbines, over one a day.

Review of Public Administration: Subordinate Legislation

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what subordinate legislation is required to fully implement the Review of Public Administration.

(AQW 17190/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Subordinate legislation will be required on the following:-

- Statutory Transition Committees – to provide for the establishment and operation of these committees, as provided for in the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010;
- Shadow arrangements – to make the necessary arrangements for the operation of the 11 new councils during the shadow period;
- Governance arrangements – to set out the demarcation of those functions that may be the responsibility of the executive and those that may not; the procedures in relation to access to meetings of and information relating to executive decision-making; and the specification of matters which must be included in a council's standing orders;
- The new ethical standards framework;
- Community planning – to specify the bodies which must participate in community planning; and
- Severance - to provide for the award of severance payments to councillors who decide not to seek re-election to the new councils.

The subordinate legislation to commence all the sections of the Planning Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 to enable the new councils to operate as local planning authorities was set out in my response to AQW 13738/11-15 on 14 September 2012.

Other Ministers may also need to bring forward subordinate legislation in order to transfer functions for which they are responsible to local government.

Planning: Reduced Application Fees

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment whether consideration has been given to the introduction of a reduced planning fee for applications that are submitted after the five year expiry date of a previous planning approval, to ensure that the live approval is maintained.

(AQW 17195/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Under the Planning (Fees) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, the fee for a renewal of a planning approval or an application submitted after the permission expiry date is the same as for a new application.

However, the Review of Planning Fees and Funding consultation paper which I intend to launch shortly will propose a significant reduction in the fee for a renewal of a planning approval. Following this consultation changes to the legislation could be introduced by mid 2013.

It is intended that the proposed change would help alleviate some of the financial burden on developers affected by the economic downturn.

Taxi Operator Licences

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment to explain the rationale behind the introduction of Taxi Operator Licences.

(AQW 17224/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The rationale is captured by the fact that the Assembly passed primary legislation for the purpose of taxi operator licences. This will help address illegal operators and enhance customer confidence and experience. The full reform of taxis will see better opportunities for the business, including individual and small operators.

The Taxi Operator Licensing regime came into operation on 1 September 2012. Since 31 October 2012 all those providing taxi services are required to hold an operator licence, be listed as an affiliated driver on an operator licence, or to have submitted a complete and valid application for a licence to DVA.

Taxi operator licensing is designed to ensure that fare paying passengers are guaranteed that, when they use a licensed operator, they will be getting a safe car and safe driver. It places responsibility on operators to ensure that all drivers and vehicles are licensed and this will make it easier for my Department to identify and tackle those providing illegal taxis.

The new Regulations give fare paying passengers, for the first time, the assurance that when they use a licensed taxi operator they are dealing with a professional service provider who only uses properly licensed drivers and vehicles. This has brought taxi operators in Northern Ireland into line with a number of their counterparts in the rest of Britain and Ireland and has implemented a key element of the Taxis Act passed by the Assembly in 2008.

Effective operator licensing will contribute to improving standards in the industry generally, to the benefit of consumers.

Taxi Operator Licences

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment how many applications for Taxi Operator Licences have been received by his Department; and how many have been granted.

(AQW 17225/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Up to and including 26 November 2012, 1848 taxi operator licence applications had been received and 1328 temporary licences issued.

Local Government: Severance Scheme

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of the Environment whether his proposals for an Elected Members Severance Scheme will be included in the Local Government Reorganisation Bill; and if not, what legislation does he intend to use for this purpose.

(AQW 17284/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It will not be necessary that proposals for a severance scheme for councillors will not be included in the Local Government Reorganisation Bill.

This is because Section 19 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 already makes the necessary provision for councillors' severance arrangements. This includes an enabling power for the Department to make regulations for severance payments to councillors.

A public consultation on draft regulations for the severance scheme will take place shortly.

Planning: L/2011/0079/O

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment when a decision will be made on planning application L/2011/0079/O.
(AQW 17304/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has agreed a design concept that complies with planning policy and guidance for this new housing development. However, three issues have been raised through the consultation process; namely flood risk, pressure on the existing road network and possible land contamination from the previous uses on the site.

The agent was advised in April and May 2012 of additional information required in relation to roads and flood risk respectively. To date this information has not been submitted. Planning Officials met with the agent on 15 November 2012, where these issues were discussed and the agent requested to provide the necessary information.

The Department's NIEA (Land and Resource Management) has also committed to respond on a contamination report supplied by the agent by 10 December 2012. It is also anticipated that Environmental Health officials in Fermanagh District Council will follow with their comments after NIEA has commented.

Planning: Enforcement Cases

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning enforcement cases are open in each divisional planning area.

(AQW 17337/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As of the 3 December 2012 there were 3,261 'live' enforcement cases under consideration by Planning across the area office network. The attached table provides details of the number of cases by local government district and grouped by Area Planning Office. It includes cases which are at various stages of consideration from initial investigation of an alleged breach to court action following failure to comply with an enforcement notice or breach of condition notice.

Please note: This information has come from a live database and as such has not been validated. Therefore these figures may not equate to finalised Official Statistics.

Area Office	LGD	No. of cases as of 3 Dec 2012
Belfast	Ards	208
	Belfast	230
	Castlereagh	49
	Lisburn	320
	North Down	132
	Total	939
Northern	Ballymoney	18
	Coleraine	68
	Derry	204
	Limavady	41
	Moyle	37
	Strabane	46
	Total	414
South Antrim	Antim	74
	Ballymena	58
	Carrickfergus	17
	Larne	27
	Newtownabbey	68
	Total	244
Southern	Armagh	108
	Banbridge	84
	Craigavon	65
	Down	416
	Newry and Mourne	217
	Total	890
Strategic Planning	All Districts	421
	Total	421
Western	Cookstown	54
	Dungannon	86
	Fermanagh	90
	Magherafelt	47
	Omagh	76
	Total	353
Overall Total		3,261

MOT Test: Impact of EU Directive

Mr Craig asked the Minister of the Environment what impact the new MOT directives have had on vehicle pass rates.
(AQW 17338/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The latest available vehicle test pass rate figures, which were published in accordance with the guidelines on Official Statistics, are for the period from April to June 2012, and the table below compares these figures with those for the equivalent period in 2011, before the implementation of European Directive 2010/48/EU.

Breakdown of Vehicle Test Pass Rates - Full Tests Only			
Test Category	Apr-Jun 2011	Apr-Jun 2012	% Change
Private Car	79.0%	79.4%	0.5%
Motorcycles*	93.4%	93.4%	0.0%
Light Goods	73.8%	73.3%	-0.5%
Heavy Goods	68.1%	69.3%	1.2%
Trailer	77.1%	78.1%	1.0%
Omnibus	78.6%	74.9%	-3.7%
Taxi	73.4%	72.3%	-1.1%
LPCV	80.6%	82.7%	2.1%
Single Vehicle Approval*	73.3%	63.6%	-9.7%
Carriage of Dangerous Goods*	96.9%	98.7%	1.8%
Overall	78.8%	79.2%	0.4%

Source: DVA Booking Services System, Report V4

*Directive 2010/48/EU does not apply

The figures show that implementation of 2010/48/EU had a negligible effect on overall pass rates. However, it should be noted that pass rates can be affected by a variety of factors in addition to changes in the legislative requirements.

Vehicle pass rates for the next quarter are due to be published by the Driver & Vehicle Agency during December 2012, and will be available on the NI Direct website.

MOT Certificates: Vintage Vehicles

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 16072/11-15, what measures are in place to prevent old vehicles of a certain age being driven on the road without the need for an MOT certificate.
(AQW 17353/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As stated in response to the related AQW 16072/11-15, all cars over four years old, including vintage vehicles, are required to be tested annually under the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995. The Driver & Vehicle Agency promotes a range of compliance measures, which were also referred to in that response, including the requirement for MOT certificates to be displayed on car windscreens, reminder letters, roadside checks by DVA staff and the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the use of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras to identify non-compliant vehicles.

Motor vehicles, including those not subject to MOT certification, must be constructed and maintained in a roadworthy condition. It is an offence under the Order to use a vehicle on a road in a dangerous condition, and DVA staff and the PSNI may prohibit the use of a motor vehicle identified to be in an unroadworthy condition.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect his Department.
(AQW 17366/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the current economic climate, I recognise the importance of cashflow for many suppliers. My Department is committed to the prompt payment of valid invoices striving to pay as many suppliers as possible within 10 days. Indeed, for the first six months of the current financial year, my Department has paid 92.1% of suppliers within the 10 day target.

Consequently, the proposed implementation of the late payment directive and setting of a 30 day payment target is expected to have minimal impact, on my Department, since we strive to pay all valid invoices in a much shorter timescale.

MOT: Exemptions

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the recent decision by the British Government to exempt pre-1960 cars from an MOT, what implications this decision has for vehicles being driven in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 17367/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have answered questions very similar to this on a number of occasions over recent months, most recently in October 2012 (AQW 15195/11-15), and the response remains the same, as detailed below.

The Department has consulted on possible exemption of certain categories of historic vehicles from MOT testing and the Environment Committee, at its meeting on 22 March 2012, considered the synopsis of responses to the Department's consultation. The responses indicated that there is broad support for exemption of pre-1960 vehicles from periodic testing.

The Committee was content with the Department's proposed way forward, which was to develop policy on the basis of the consultation responses that would make use of the exemption in Roadworthiness Directive 2009/40/EC concerning the periodic testing of pre-1960 vehicles. This would align with the British Government's exemption, from 18 November 2012, of pre-1960 vehicles from MOT testing.

There have been significant European Commission (EC) policy developments since our consultation. On 13 July 2012, the EC published a 'Roadworthiness Package' that, amongst other things, addresses periodic roadworthiness tests for motor vehicles, therein making changes to the rules that apply to historic vehicles. The proposals are expected to be introduced no earlier than August 2014.

If implemented as currently drafted, the proposals will narrow the parameters within which the Department can provide for exemptions to historic vehicles, as the definition of an historical vehicle is more prescriptively described.

The Department's policy intentions remain the same; that is to make exempt pre-1960 vehicles from the MOT regime, but we have to be mindful of the changing legislative context, to ensure that any changes we make are not made redundant by incoming EC Regulations.

I expect to be in a position to provide further clarification on the Department's position in the coming weeks.

Taxis: Numbers in Operation

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many taxis are currently operating.
(AQW 17373/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are currently 9,615 taxis licensed to operate in Northern Ireland, this does not mean that this full number is actually operating.

Department of Finance and Personnel

INTERREG IV

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the total spend to date by cross border groups under INTERREG IV Programmes on (i) travel; (ii) accommodation; and (iii) subsistence outside the UK in each year of the Programme.

(AQW 16418/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The table below shows spend in each year of the INTERREG IVA Programme to date for the Cross Border Groups.

Year	Travel ¹	Accommodation	Subsistence
2007/08	NIL	NIL	NIL
2008/09	NIL	NIL	NIL
2009/10	£3,702.45	£6,970.72	£2,923.33
2010/11	£3,479.86	£6,166.79	£2,402.07
2011/12	£13,472.01	£15,269.76	£6,092.38
2012/13	£7,138.22	£10,806.65	£5,845.89

1 ICBAN (Irish Central Border Area Network) does not break down as separate travel costs between Northern Ireland and the Republic Of Ireland. EBR (East Border Region) input is based on travel outside the UK and Ireland.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 15526/11-15, given that the number of vacant properties with an Net Annual Value (NAV) of £2,000 or less has grown by 23 percent since March 2010, and that the total number of properties with an NAV of £2,000 or less has continued to increase regardless of demand, (i) what engagement he has had with the Department of the Environment on this issue; and (ii) what steps are being taken to stem the rise in the total number of properties and to address the imbalance between need and demand.

(AQW 16799/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I can understand your interest in these statistics and why you have queried them. However, the significant increase in the number of low value entries in the Valuation List does not mean that there is a corresponding rise in the total number of such properties "on the ground".

Although LPS do not assemble data on the reasons for new entries appearing in the Valuation List, they can occur for a variety of reasons. In this case LPS believe that many of these are due to individual ratepayers requesting the valuation entry to be subdivided or split, in order to avail of a relief or exclusion.

For example the higher rate of small business rate relief or the general non-domestic vacant rating exclusion, both of which have a £2,000 NAV limit. LPS have come to this conclusion because of the increase in the number of individual car parking spaces, which seem to account for a high proportion of the new entries

It is becoming more commonplace for business ratepayers to review their property assets during the continuing downturn and request a revision to minimise their rate liability.

This is not evidence of any imbalance in supply or demand in the property development market. Therefore there has been no engagement with DOE on the matter and I see no reason to take any other action.

NEETs: West Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many young people in West Belfast are not in employment, education or training.

(AQW 16805/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Estimates of young people not in employment, education or training are sourced to the Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, these estimates are not available at Parliamentary Constituency level, as the LFS sample size and design does not support the production of sufficiently reliable estimates of this type at constituency level.

For information, during the period July – September 2012, the LFS estimated that there were 8,000 (25.2%) 16-24 year olds in Belfast District Council Area who were not in employment, Government supported training or full-time education.

Peace III

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail, for Peace III Priority 1 Sub Priority 1.1 Regional Projects, the (i) amount of grant awarded; (ii) date of the award; (iii) end date of the project as per the letter of offer; and (iv) amount of claimed but disallowed expenditure, for each group that received grants under the (a) Conflict Transformation from the bottom up; and (b) From Prison to peace project titles.

(AQW 16835/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Table 1 attached details the grant awarded, date of award, project end date, and the amounts claimed, disallowed and paid, in respect of each group that received grants under Phase I of the Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up PEACE III project. Table 2 details the same information in respect of the From Prison to Peace project. The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland is the lead partner for both projects.

Second phases of funding for both projects has been approved by the PEACE III Steering Committee, however, Letters of Offer have not yet issued.

An exchange rate of £1 = €1.25 has been used where required.

Table 1 – Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up

Project Partner	Grant Awarded	Award Date	End Date of Project	Claimed	Disallowed Expenditure	Paid
Committee - (Coiste)	£1,420,734	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£1,420,410	-	£1,420,410
Come In - (Tar Isteach)	£871,479	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£871,479	-	£871,479
Come Over - (Tar Anall)	£399,121	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£402,902	£3,781	£399,121
Come Home - (Tar Abhaile)	£341,845	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£341,844	-	£341,844
South Armagh Ex-Prisoners (Iar Chimi Ard Mhaca Theas)	£293,236	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£293,236	£1,656	£291,580
South Derry Ex-Prisoners (Iar Chimi Doire Theas)	£145,591	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£145,102	-	£145,102

Project Partner	Grant Awarded	Award Date	End Date of Project	Claimed	Disallowed Expenditure	Paid
The Rising of the Sun (Éiri na Gréine)	£3,628	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£3,628	-	£3,628
Friends - (Cairde)	£162,519	01/09/2008	30/04/2012	£162,519	-	£162,519
A New Beginning (Tús Nua)	£325,870	£39,692	31/07/2012	£325,858	-	£325,858
Welcome Home (Fáilte Abhaile)	£837,243	£39,692	31/07/2012	£838,122	£1,703	£836,419
Home Again - (Abhaile Arís)	£768,671	£39,692	31/07/2012	£768,500	-	£768,500
Welcome Clones (Fáilte Cluain Eois)	£527,459	£39,692	31/07/2012	£524,538	-	£524,538
A New Day - (La Nua)	£454,843	£39,692	31/07/2012	£454,543	-	£454,543

Table 2 – From Prison to Peace

Lead Partner	Grant Awarded	Award Date	End Date of Project	Claimed	Disallowed Expenditure	Paid
Community Foundation NI	£3,073,458	22/12/2008	31/07/2012	£3,033,209	£22,046	£3,011,163

BACKGROUND NOTE

- The information presented is based on a download from the Systems 2007 database on 31 October 2012. The database is live and dynamic and is reliant on funding bodies to provide and update information.
- Second phases of funding for both projects have been approved by the PEACE III Steering Committee. Letters of Offer have not yet issued. Breakdowns of the Phase 2 funding are provided in Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3 – Conflict Transformation from the Bottom Up

Project Partner	Grant Approved
Committee (Coiste)	£894,437
Come In (Tar Isteach)	£732,847
Come Over (Tar Anall)	£800,075
Come Home (Tar Abhaile)	£341,624
South Armagh Ex-Prisoners (Iar Chimi Ard Mhaca Theas)	£230,651
South Derry Ex-Prisoners (Iar Chimi Doire Theas)	£176,240
The Rising of the Sun (Éiri na Gréine)	£170,621
Friends (Cairde)	£160,079
A New Beginning (Tús Nua)	£310,466
Welcome Home (Fáilte Abhaile)	£685,748
Home Again (Abhaile Arís)	£691,286
Welcome Clones (Fáilte Cluain Eois)	£541,653
A New Day (La Nua)	£359,818
CFNI Management Costs	£723,026
Total	£6,818,571

Table 4 – From Prison to Peace (inclusive of OFMDFM interim funding of £856,000)

Project Partner	Grant Approved
The Key Charter (An Eochair)	£201,949

Project Partner	Grant Approved
CHARTER	£404,815
The Ex-Prisoners Committee (Coiste na nIarchimi)	£167,399
EPIC (Central)	£309,283
EPIC (North Ulster)	£205,366
Lisburn PSP (incl South Belfast)	£361,181
North Belfast CD & Transition Group	£309,102
North Down CA	£259,171
The Welcome House (Teach na Failte)	£453,755
The Hubb	£211,124
West Belfast PIP	£378,673
CFNI	£694,382
Total	£3,956,200

Drafted by - Steve Clements, 29 November 2012

Cleared by Head of Division – Maura Young, 29 November 2012

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Rates: Convergence

Mr Spratt asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration he has given to the rates convergence issue in April 2015; (ii) what transitional relief financed by Central Government for ratepayers he will propose; and (iii) for his assessment of the impact of rates convergence.

(AQW 16874/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The issue of rates convergence is a consequence of the local government reform and whilst it is important to note that the Department of the Environment (DOE) has overall policy responsibility for the reform programme, my Department has also been working closely with them on the specific issue of rates convergence, for which I have policy responsibility.

This is a complex and important issue and as such it does not lend itself to a convenient or straightforward solution. Work is progressing on identifying a range of options and this will continue over the coming months, before recommendations are presented to the Executive for decision. My Department will play its part and assist DOE throughout the process.

At this stage I am not in a position to indicate what proposals I would support. What I can say, however, is that this Executive will not preside over a reform programme that is all about effective and efficient delivery of local government, if the immediate consequence is a significant increase in rate bills for some ratepayers. Where the Executive has the ability it will aim to tailor transitional arrangements to meet local needs.

It is too early to say exactly what the impact of rates convergence will be because there are a number of unknown factors to be taken into account, including budget levels for the new councils and the effect of the non domestic rates revaluation scheduled for April 2015. It is also worth noting that any large changes in district rates would be tempered by the regional rate element of rates bills and therefore are not of the scale reported in parts of the local press.

The Executive's wider position on the funding of local government reform has consistently been that:

- (i) local government will be the beneficiaries of the savings which reform will deliver and therefore the up-front costs of implementing the reform should be met by local government; and
- (ii) the functions which are to transfer from central government to local government should be fit for purpose, sufficiently resourced and rates neutral at the point of transfer.

As you will appreciate, these are evolving issues. My Ministerial colleague, Alex Attwood, will report back to the Assembly as matters progress. Rest assured I, along with my Department, will be closely involved in developing balanced and workable policies that facilitate both the reform process and the rating system.

Public Procurement: Pre-qualification Quotation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, within the public procurement process, what follow-up checks are carried out to ensure that the sub-contractors named for use in the Pre-Qualification Quotation of the successful bidder are in fact engaged, given that the reputation of such sub-contractors contributes to the quality mark awarded.

(AQW 16882/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Procurement Guidance stipulates that Departments should only consent to the replacement of a subcontractor where there are compelling reasons to do so. Where a subcontractor has been assessed as part of the contractor's team, that subcontractor should only be replaced by one of equal standing.

As part of its contract conditions for construction works, Central Procurement Directorate requires contractors to seek acceptance from the Project Manager before appointing subcontractors. To manage this process, the contractor is required to submit a report to the Project Manager setting out details of proposed subcontracts.

Before accepting any subcontract, checks are undertaken to verify that the proposed subcontractor is the firm named by the contractor in its Pre-Qualification Questionnaire.

Public Procurement: Pre-qualification Quotation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, within the public procurement process in civil engineering projects, whether the Pre-Qualification Quotation documentation, submitted by the successful applicant, is sent to the departmental engineer so that its content and promise can be checked against the work and provisions made.

(AQW 16883/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The process used to select contractors for invitation to tender is set down in Procurement Guidance Note 04/10 – Selection and Pre-Qualification of Contractors.

For civil engineering projects in Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) the Civil Engineer has an integral role in the assessment of the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) during the selection process.

The only information in the PQQ that has a direct read across to the service delivery relates to subcontractors. On occasions tenderers are required to provide details of key subcontractors that the Civil Engineer wishes to consider as part of the selection process.

A tenderer must retain the same named and assessed subcontractors throughout the process. A change is only permitted in exceptional circumstances and would otherwise result in the exclusion of the tender.

Public Procurement: Payments to Subcontractors

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, within the public procurement process, what checks are carried out to ensure that after the main contractor is paid, the sub-contractors are paid expeditiously, given the disincentive under which they operate when it comes to making a complaint, because of their dependence on the main contractor.

(AQW 16884/11-15)

Mr Wilson: CPD guidance for public sector contracts includes a number of measures aimed at ensuring prompt payment to subcontractors. These include:

- Payments by main contractors to be made within 30 days of receipt of a valid invoice.
- Monthly reporting by main contractors on subcontractor payment progress (where the subcontract value exceeds 1% of the total contract or £10k).
- 'Payment Issues' to be a standing agenda item for project meetings.
- Validation by project managers that subcontractors have received payments due by conducting random checks.
- Exclusion of main contractors from future government tender opportunities for a year if they fail to comply with contract conditions relating to prompt payment of subcontractors.

The Construction Contracts (Amendment) Act (NI), which came into effect on 14 November 2012, will help to improve the legal position of subcontractors in all construction contracts.

While recognising the difficulties faced by subcontractors and their position in the supply chain, they must be cautious when agreeing contracts that they do not agree to overly onerous terms, and must be prepared to seek redress through the remedies available to them.

Rates: Rebate Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the plans for a replacement to the rate rebate scheme that currently operates under the housing benefit system.

(AQW 16907/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Welfare Reform and its implications for the rating system, is something that has been, and is being, actively considered by the Executive Subgroup on Welfare Reform. It is a massive and wide reaching issue and one that I think will have to be tackled by the Executive in 3 distinct phases:

- a holding operation;
- an interim modified scheme; and then
- a long term solution.

In respect of the holding operation the Executive agreed in May of this year to preserve entitlement to the current level of rates support for up to two years, following the change in funding arrangements which will occur in April 2013. The Press Release can be accessed at the link below:

<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dfp/news-releases-dfp-june-2012/news-dfp-010612-finance-minister-sammy.htm>

This holding operation will soon become impracticable and unaffordable and therefore the Executive will have to consider alternatives. Officials in the Department for Social Development are looking at long term solutions that look at a range of non social security benefits that will sit outside Universal Credit and over which Northern Ireland has discretion in spending. This may present an opportunity to better target vulnerable households and make better use of limited resources.

In the meantime, however, I believe we will need to have an interim modified scheme ready when Universal Credit is established. Accordingly, I will be asking the Executive to agree to a preliminary consultation in the New Year.

This will not only present some challenging issues and high level choices to be made, it will also afford stakeholders the opportunity to come forward with evidence. The process will help inform policy direction for a scheme that effectively supports households least able to pay domestic rates. A further public consultation will occur when detailed options are sufficiently developed and impacts assessed.

A helpful consequence of the Social Development Minister's achievement in securing the postponement of the introduction of Universal Credit in NI, to April 2014, is that we may be in a position to allow the current Housing Benefit rebate scheme to roll on as part of social security until April 2014, meaning no change in practical and monetary terms to claimants. This will, however, still require the Executive to make up the 10% funding shortfall as previously agreed, the costs estimates of which are £13 million in 2013-14 and possibly up to £20 million in 2014-15.

Public Procurement: Obligations on Contractors

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether there any provisions in place within the public procurement process to inhibit a contractor, who avoids his full obligations to his sub-contractors by securing a voluntary creditors agreement, from subsequently applying for and securing further Government contracts.

(AQW 16912/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Procurement Board has agreed that any tender for government contracts from a business in administration will not be considered. Central Procurement Directorate is developing guidance to ensure a business is excluded from the tender process immediately it enters administration.

If a contractor on a government contract fails to meet its contractual obligations in relation to payment of subcontractors, due to entering into a voluntary creditors agreement, it may be excluded from tendering for government contracts for a year in line with the protocol for managing poor contractor performance.

However, if creditors agree to a financial arrangement in relation to non government contracts that enables a contractor to carry on trading, it must be given fair and equal consideration as with any other applicant.

Peace III and INTERREG IV: Funding

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the (i) PEACE III; and (ii) INTERREG IV funding that has been allocated; and spent in (a) each council district area; and (b) the South Armagh area, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 16937/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Table 1 and Table 2 below present funding awarded to projects based in each Local Government District, and funding spent, under the PEACE III and INTERREG IVA Programmes, in each of the last three years. An exchange rate of £1 = €1.25 has been used.

The information presented was produced by using project address information to allocate a project to a particular postcode and subsequently a Local Government District. Where the project address was insufficient to allocate the project, organisation address details were used.

Due to the strategic nature of PEACE III projects the organisation address is often regional headquarters, but it is unlikely that all elements of the project will be based in these headquarters. This is particularly relevant when organisation address is used in lieu of project address in this geographical analysis.

INTERREG IVA promotes integrated regional development between neighbouring regions on different sides of the border. As a result, all approved projects are cross-border in nature. Whilst funding for a particular project may be focused on one or the other side of the border, it must be shown that the operation has a significant impact on the other. Therefore, due to the cross-border nature of the funding, the scope or impacts of all projects will extend beyond the geographical location of the project itself and cannot be readily assigned to a particular County, Parliamentary Constituency or Local Government District. For example, while a project may have a project address in Armagh, it will also have an impact in the Border Region.

The information recorded on the EU funding database does not enable allocation to the South Armagh area to be detailed.

Table 1 – PEACE III

		2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)
Armagh	Award	1,774,520.58	6,240,272.24	1,783,910.84
	Spend	1,821,909.04	316,058.99	132,181.45
Antrim	Award	49,097.64	213,483.24	301,548.40
	Spend	25,476.71	122,497.88	8,284.56
Ards	Award	79,983.88	254,525.47	415,242.00
	Spend	65,338.82	162,154.37	-
Ballymena	Award	531,927.94	-	113,160.00
	Spend	510,263.08	-	14,012.12
Ballymoney	Award	-	91,043.20	113,160.00
	Spend	-	96,168.48	1,023.57
Banbridge	Award	479,136.00	-	733,570.28
	Spend	518,944.84	-	164,280.85
Belfast	Award	15,618,143.70	7,399,943.51	14,827,653.19
	Spend	13,731,361.22	3,184,438.90	1,861,925.82
Carrickfergus	Award	186,230.82	227,598.80	-
	Spend	191,246.11	240,413.64	-
Castlereagh	Award	27,593.56	4,475,382.32	-
	Spend	8,546.60	466,186.74	-
Coleraine	Award	273,934.73	1,154,806.71	2,085,722.80
	Spend	288,627.93	741,402.92	424,858.53
Cookstown	Award	1,996,188.61	260,294.90	508,081.10
	Spend	705,344.74	259,152.96	8,825.62
Craigavon	Award	1,022,433.26	6,148,272.24	681,580.16
	Spend	1,099,533.38	216,357.87	51,688.36
Derry	Award	3,726,742.63	178,157.08	6,790,865.26
	Spend	3,733,998.89	140,744.01	636,856.44
Down	Award	410,355.13	197,550.02	651,185.16
	Spend	361,601.77	181,522.91	122,220.28
Dungannon	Award	763,149.74	210,215.40	293,601.44
	Spend	781,955.18	171,061.46	173,492.25
Fermanagh	Award	1,422,095.23	148,569.42	464,353.34
	Spend	1,441,574.18	107,779.01	9,825.31
Larne	Award	-	-	113,155.22
	Spend	-	-	4,909.18
Limavady	Award	-	54,004.00	113,160.00
	Spend	-	47,309.90	6,683.32
Lisburn	Award	537,148.48	617,866.86	17,493,504.68
	Spend	486,121.45	586,084.91	102,708.38

		2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)
Magherafelt	Award	472,290.17	223,341.29	611,506.99
	Spend	486,639.51	213,890.32	251,001.17
Moyle	Award	-	-	113,160.00
	Spend	-	-	13,501.02
Newry and Mourne	Award	1,632,247.56	164,544.00	1,804,318.28
	Spend	1,746,880.61	167,263.46	618,808.26
Newtownabbey	Award	412,052.37	202,981.68	893,107.48
	Spend	413,509.41	142,558.58	164,730.98
North Down	Award	619,851.35	861,114.58	1,064,720.06
	Spend	588,978.15	734,306.77	193,112.39
Omagh	Award	1,302,450.35	-	2,041,684.56
	Spend	1,275,432.78	-	114,536.75
Strabane	Award	1,078,584.50	-	282,433.79
	Spend	1,100,314.30	-	59,758.11

Table 2 – INTERREG IVA

INTERREG IVA		2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)
Armagh	Award	1,381,654.15	3,843,696.52	-
	Spend	1,177,720.41	585,724.70	-
Antrim	Award	383,442.69	-	205,061.56
	Spend	131,270.50	-	-
Ards	Award	4,113.32	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Ballymena	Award	3,779,476.58	5,345,611.24	2,168,735.32
	Spend	2,557,567.58	30,357.80	302,485.08
Ballymoney	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Banbridge	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Belfast	Award	7,239,919.12	20,608,523.11	1,618,271.88
	Spend	3,342,948.01	11,487,626.11	5,923.33
Carrickfergus	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Castlereagh	Award	-	2,084,393.11	-
	Spend	-	804,870.69	-
Coleraine	Award	118,437.60	-	-
	Spend	129,568.62	-	-
Cookstown	Award	59,726.40	-	-
	Spend	50,921.92	-	-
Craigavon	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-

INTERREG IVA		2009/10 (£)	2010/11 (£)	2011/12 (£)
Derry	Award	9,644,381.58	2,006,428.80	1,257,999.48
	Spend	4,503,703.73	297,903.45	-
Down	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Dungannon	Award	-	437,909.08	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Fermanagh	Award	2,188,307.40	8,829,527.68	639,904.00
	Spend	1,450,228.65	1,806,513.48	-
Larne	Award	26,337.57	3,226,862.28	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Limavady	Award	2,739,713.08	-	-
	Spend	2,799,756.78	-	-
Lisburn	Award	221,779.17	-	-
	Spend	96,834.31	-	-
Magherafelt	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Moyle	Award	491,390.40	-	-
	Spend	556,780.00	-	-
Newry and Mourne	Award	831,888.84	5,239,063.38	12,692,687.64
	Spend	654,504.09	1,593,288.35	4,231.02
Newtownabbey	Award	-	-	785,968.88
	Spend	-	-	7,151.37
North Down	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Omagh	Award	-	-	-
	Spend	-	-	-
Strabane	Award	-	283,360.00	-
	Spend	-	-	-

Background Note

3 The information presented is based on a download from the Systems 2007 database on 19 November 2012. The database is live and dynamic and is reliant on funding bodies to provide and update information. An exchange rate of £1 = €1.25 has been used.

Drafted by - Steve Clements, 29 November 2012

Cleared by Head of Division – Maura Young, 29 November 2012

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Rates: Exemptions

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail all the types of groups, organisations or individuals who qualify for rates exemptions.

(AQW 16993/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is a wide range of rating exemptions, reliefs and exclusions available to qualifying ratepayers under the Rates (Northern Ireland) Order 1977. In many cases, these go beyond what is available in Great Britain. Of course, every relief granted while assisting groups or individuals means less money for public services in Northern Ireland.

Any group, organisation or individual may qualify for rate reliefs and/or exemptions. Qualification in some instances is automatic, for example, the domestic maximum 'cap' or small business rate relief, whereas others are by application and circumstance, for example, Housing Benefit or empty shops rate concession. The following table lists the main reliefs and exemptions currently available.

Domestic Reliefs and Exemptions

- **4% (early payment) discount:** Reduction for those that pay their rate bill by the date requested by Land & Property Services (around one month after the bill is due).
- **Maximum Cap:** Provision that caps the rates liability for properties with a Capital Value above £400,000.
- **Disabled person's allowance:** 25% reduction in rates liability for properties adapted, or with additional facilities, to meet the needs of a resident disabled person.
- **Housing Benefit:** Help with rates for those on low incomes.
- **Church Houses:** A 50% partial exemption from rates for houses used by religious ministers of any denomination.
- **Landlord allowance:**
- Article 20 (7.5% allowance): Article 21 (12.5% allowance):

An allowance is awarded to landlords liable to pay rates on their property (Article 20 is obligatory; for properties of certain values and with certain rent frequency). Article 21 is a voluntary arrangement.

The allowance acts as mechanism to increase and strengthen revenue collection for rental properties, through the landlord paying rates, where these are often of a temporary or transient nature and would otherwise give rise to major revenue collection difficulties.

- **Low Income Rate Relief Scheme:** A local supplement to Housing Benefit, for those on low income who are in receipt of either partial Housing Benefit or just outside the Housing Benefit thresholds.
- **Lone Pensioner Allowance:** Ratepayers aged 70 or over and living alone (with some exceptions) may be entitled to a 20% reduction in their rates. Entitlement is not affected by income or savings.
- **Developer Exclusion:** Developers will get 100% relief for 12 months from the date of completing a domestic property (or until sold)

Non-Domestic Reliefs and Exemptions

- **Charities:** Rates are generally not payable if a property is occupied by a charity and used for public benefit or for charitable purposes. The rates exemption applies only to the portion of the property occupied and used for such purposes and is subject to certain restrictions.
- **Community halls:** An exemption from rates is provided where premises are occupied by certain bodies where the premises are used, or are available for use by other organisations for charitable/public benefit purposes. There are certain exclusions.
- **Farmhouses:** A valuation allowance awarded where a house is situated on a farm and used and occupied by someone whose primary occupation is farming on that land.
- **Freight Transport relief:** Occupiers of freight transport properties are entitled to 75% rate relief.
- **Hardship Relief:** A measure that gives DFP the discretion to reduce rates in exceptional circumstances where hardship would otherwise result.
- **Industrial derating:** Manufacturing firms occupying qualifying industrial properties pay 30% of the normal occupied rates, providing support to the manufacturing sector.
- **Quarries and mines:** A 50% reduction is applied to the Net Annual Value of mines and quarries, followed by the application industrial derating.
- **Rural ATMs:** Exemption from rates for ATMs in designated rural areas.
- **Sport and recreational relief:** Rate relief is available for premises which are occupied for the purposes of physical recreation at an amateur level
- **Vacant rating (initial 3 month exemption):** Generally commercial properties subject to vacant rating are exempt from the charge for the first three months.
- **Vacant rating (50% relief):** Properties subject to commercial vacant rating are chargeable to rates at 50% of the occupied rate.
- **Vacant rating exclusions** can be awarded, by application, if the property meets any of the prescribed, qualifying criterion.
- **Window displays:** Vacant shops can have a display (non-commercial and non-political) no more than 1.5 metres in depth without attracting a rate liability.
- **Empty shops rate concession:** Where a property becomes occupied and was previously vacant (used for retail purposes) for a period of 12 months, rates will be charged at 50% for the first 12 months.
- **Small Business Rate Relief:** relief for certain properties with an NAV less than £10,000.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the impact that the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme can have in rejuvenating town centres; and whether he has considered extending the conditions of eligibility or the duration of the one year concession.

(AQW 16994/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Small Business Rate Relief scheme is not specifically targeted at town centres as the Executive decided not to target specific areas in order to provide support to the wider business community.

At present, it is too early to judge the scheme's full impact on our town centres. However, this is one of the areas that my Department will look at in the context of the scheme's evaluation which is due to take place in 2014.

In relation to your second question, to help build on the success of the empty shops rates concession during the past year, I announced to the Assembly on Monday 26 November that I intend to extend the scheme to allow applications for the one year concession through to 31 March 2015, subject to Assembly approval. There are no plans to alter the conditions of eligibility or the duration of the award.

I trust I can rely on your support and that of your party when I present the required subordinate legislation for the empty shops rates concession to the Assembly in a few weeks time.

NI Direct: Website

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many (i) hits; (ii) visits; and (iii) unique users have been recorded by the NI Direct website, in each year since its launch in April 2009.

(AQW 17041/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of (i) hits (Page Impressions); (ii) visits; and (iii) unique users (visitors) recorded by the nidirect website, in each year since its launch in April 2009 are outlined overleaf.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13 (up to 21 Nov)
Page Impressions	4,191,250	9,231,199	14,728,008	12,031,214
Visits	1,526,708	3,118,686	4,832,779	4,611,371
Unique Visitors	1,353,048	2,628,709	3,963,840	3,889,308

notes

- 1 Page impression: The viewing by a visitor of any page on the site. Each page viewed counts as one page impression.
- 2 Visits: The number of times each visitor has visited the site over the specified period. A visit is a series of actions that begins when a visitor views their first page from the server, and ends when the visitor leaves the site or remains idle beyond the idle-time limit. Therefore a visit can be comprised of several page impressions
- 3 Unique visitor: A computer from which a person/persons are browsing. Each visitor is identified using a combination of IP address, domain name or cookie. Each unique visitor for a period may make multiple visits to the site.

NI Direct: Website

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many information items are available on the NI Direct website.

(AQW 17042/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The nidirect website currently has 6,044 interactive pages of content providing information across 16 themes and a further 1500 information documents in pdf format. It provides access to more than 100 interactive tools and applications, for example, benefits adviser, order a birth certificate, book your MOT, driving theory test and driving test, cold weather payments checker and claim your state pension.

NI Direct: Budget

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the budget allocated to the NI Direct website in (i) 2012-13; (ii) 2013-14; and (iii) 2014-15.

(AQW 17043/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The budget allocated to the nidirect website for 2012/13, 2013/14 and 2014/15 is provided below.

Financial Year	Amount
2012/13	£749,000
2013/14	£876,000
2014/15	£876,000

NI Direct: Staff

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many staff support the NI Direct website broken down by (i) content; (ii) editorial; (iii) management; and (iv) marketing and other functions.

(AQW 17045/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Central Editorial team has 7 posts and provides the editorial function, marketing and management. The central team contributes to content across all 16 themes, particularly when new areas of content are being developed.

Additional support is provided by 8 department-based part-time theme managers.

There is also a team of 7 staff who provide technical development and support.

Barnett Consequentials

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what contact he has had with Treasury regarding possible Barnett consequentials that have not been recognised or contested by his Department in the past two years.

(AQW 17083/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Executive, along with the other Devolved Administrations, disputed the UK Government's decision not to allocate any funding to the Devolved Administrations in respect of the London Olympics. This dispute was eventually settled with a one-off allocation of £5.4 million in 2011-12.

There have been no other formal disputes over the last two years. However, my officials routinely challenge HM Treasury on spending announcements to ensure that Barnett Allocations are paid when they are properly due.

SEUPB: Capital Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether SEUPB approved capital projects are over allocated and over budget; and, if so, (i) by how much; (ii) which overallocated projects fall within the capital programme; and (iii) what is the commitment on each project.

(AQW 17093/11-15)

Mr Wilson: For the purposes of this answer it is assumed that PEACE III Theme 2.1 (Creating Shared Public Spaces) relates, as it is the key theme focussed on funding capital projects.

The total budget allocation for PEACE III Theme 2.1 is £65.6 million. Letters of Offer worth £62,090,758.18 have issued. An exchange rate of £1 = €1.25 has been used.

The PEACE III Steering Committee has approved additional projects worth £17,030,238.40, however, Letters of Offer have not yet issued to these projects. The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), as Programme Managing Authority, is working with the relevant accountable government departments and with DFP in order to agree on the most appropriate level of programme commitment to projects, taking into account factors such as slippage and exchange rate variations, and the need to maximise receipts from the European Commission.

European Regional Development Fund

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what transfers have there been from Measures 2:2 to Measure 2:1 under the current European Regional Development Fund; and when these transfers took place.

(AQW 17094/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To date there has been no transfer of funds between Themes 2.2 and 2.1 of the PEACE III Programme.

Peace III: Underspend

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the potential for the reallocation of funding between programme themes under PEACE III, what underspends are currently anticipated within each programme theme, and to what extent.

(AQW 17096/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Table 1 below details the overall budgets and commitment to date under each theme of the PEACE III Programme. Commitment refers to projects which have received a letter of offer.

Table 1 – PEACE III budget and commitment by Theme

Theme	Overall Budget (£)	Commitment to Date (£)	Potential Underspend (£)
1.1	112,734,640.00	116,896,436.55	-4,161,796.55
1.2	40,000,000.00	33,829,708.70	6,170,291.30
2.1	65,600,000.00	62,090,758.18	3,509,241.82
2.2	32,000,000.00	29,417,610.65	2,582,389.35
3.1	15,978,805.60	13,802,119.41	2,176,686.19
Total	266,313,445.60	256,036,633.49	10,276,812.11

However, in addition to the commitment figures presented in Table 1, a further sixteen projects approved by Steering Committee have not yet been issued with a letter of offer. The value of these projects is detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 – Additional projects approved by PEACE III Steering Committee

Theme	Additional Steering Committee approved projects (£)
1.1	11,019,435.00
1.2	3,870,458.00
2.1	17,030,238.40
2.2	0
3.1	0
Total	31,920,131.40

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), PEACE III Managing Authority, will bring forward proposals for reallocations between Themes at the appropriate time, should it become necessary to do so in order to ensure full commitment of the PEACE III budget until the end of the programming period.

An exchange rate of £1 = €1.25 has been used where required.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 16509/11-15, when the changes to the small business rates relief scheme will come into effect.

(AQW 17107/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As I announced in my statement to the Assembly on Monday 26 November, the latest changes to the small business rate relief will come into effect on 1 April 2013, subject to the progression of the required legislation.

The full text of my statement is available at the following link:-

<http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/statement-261112-non-domestic-rating.pdf>

I trust I can rely on your support and that of your party for the Statutory Rules associated with the measures outlined in the statement as they work through the Assembly.

Further Education Colleges: NDPB Status

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he is aware that further education colleges in England are not non-departmental public bodies; and what steps he is taking to reverse the requirements of the further education colleges.

(AQW 17123/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I was made aware that Further Education (FE) colleges in England are not non-departmental public bodies following amendments to legislation taken forward by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). Following a request from my officials in February 2012, the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) put forward a case for deferral of the reclassification of FE Colleges to non-departmental public bodies. However, this was unsuccessful and to date the DEL has not submitted a further case.

Further Education Colleges: NDPB Status

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel when he became aware that further education colleges in England were no longer non-departmental public bodies.

(AQW 17124/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I became aware that further education colleges in England were no longer non-departmental public bodies in January 2012.

Further Education Colleges: NDPB Status

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what are the benefits from the further education colleges change of status to non-departmental public bodies.

(AQW 17125/11-15)

Mr Wilson: While the Minister for Employment and Learning is answerable to the Assembly for the further education colleges, non-departmental public body status permits their services or functions to be carried out at arms length from the Department. Change of status should bring with it greater transparency and accountability in the use of public funds through the financial and management controls required of non-departmental public bodies.

Government Agencies: Call Handling Contract

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what options there were to awarding British Telecom the contract for handling calls from members of the public to Government agencies; and the cost variances to the taxpayer of these options.

(AQW 17141/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The NI Direct Strategic Partner full business case considered two models for the delivery of the range of services required. Both models use a combination of NICS and private sector resources to deliver the services outlined overleaf.

Comparative costs available reflect the total cost of the NI Direct Programme, including the contract element, under the different models. Using these, the 10 year net cost variance between the lowest priced and highest priced option is £8,536,873.

	Model One	Model Two
Contact Centre Staff	NICS	NICS & Private Sector
Business Development	NICS	NICS & Private Sector
Flooding Incident Line/Emergency Response Service	Private Sector	Private Sector
Managed ICT	Private Sector	Private Sector

EU Budget

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is deemed to be Northern Ireland's share of the UK's gross national contribution to the annual EU budget.

(AQW 17208/11-15)

Mr Wilson: UK contributions to the EU Budget are managed nationally and reported to Parliament by HM Treasury.

Contributions to the EU Budget are for the whole of the UK and the Treasury does not allocate these contributions to individual countries.

Exports

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what is the percentage of the annual exports to (i) the rest of the UK; (ii) the Republic of Ireland; (iii) the remainder of the EU and (iv) the rest of the world.

(AQW 17210/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The information requested is currently available for the manufacturing sector only, for the period 2010/11. 2011/12 data will be available by the end of 2012.

Published data from the Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey shows that Northern Ireland manufacturing businesses reported sales outside Northern Ireland of £12.4 billion in 2010/11.

The percentage of total annual sales outside Northern Ireland to (i) Great Britain was 59.2%; (ii) the Republic of Ireland was 9.9%; (iii) the rest of the EU was 9.9%; and (iv) the rest of the world was 21.0%. Additional information is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Broad destination sales and percentage of total sales from Northern Ireland manufacturing businesses 2010/11

	Total External Sales(1):	Great Britain	Republic of Ireland	Rest of European Union	Rest of World	Total Sales(2)
£m	£12,384	£7,327	£1,230	£1,228	£2,599	£15,914
% of sales	100.0	59.2	9.9	9.9	21.0	

Source: Manufacturing Sales and Exports Survey 2010/11, Economic & Labour Market Statistics Branch, NISRA

Footnotes:

1. Total External Sales = all sales outside Northern Ireland.
2. Total Sales = all sales including sales within Northern Ireland.

Redundancies: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in the Foyle constituency have been made redundant in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17222/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf details the number of confirmed redundancies in the Foyle Parliamentary Constituency Area (PCA) and Northern Ireland as a whole in each of the last 5 years.

Please note that under the Employment Rights (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (amended 8 October 2006) companies are only legally required to notify the Department of impending redundancies of 20 or more employees. Also, redundancies do not necessarily equate to job losses, for example, employees who do not qualify for a redundancy package, those on temporary contracts, will not be incorporated into the redundancy figures.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012*
Foyle PCA	297	673	145	180	13
NI Total	2,782	4,596	2,096	1,808	2,195

* Total Confirmed redundancies notified to DFP Economic and Labour Market Statistics Research Branch to 31st October 2012

Peace IV

Mr A Maginness asked Finance and Personnel to outline the status of negotiations regarding a Peace IV funding package from the EU.

(AQO 2969/11-15)

Mr Wilson: For the first time at this stage in the development cycle for a future EU Structural Fund programming period, negotiations with the EU have resulted in the inclusion of a provision for a PEACE Programme in the European Territorial Co-operation draft regulation. However, a future programme remains dependent on final agreement of the EU regulations and budget. Discussions with the United Kingdom and Irish government in respect of the financing of a PEACE IV Programme are ongoing.

Discretionary Spending

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the discretionary budgets or unrestricted capital available to each Minister for the implementation of projects.

(AQW 17359/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Once the Executive has agreed budget allocations to the departments, individual Ministers have considerable discretion in terms of prioritising both resource and capital budgets. My Statement to the Assembly on 2012-13 October Monitoring and 2013-14 & 2014-15 Budget Realignment included the latest Budget position for each department for the next two financial years.

Once the Budgets are set, the discretion to move resources throughout the financial year is subject to the in-year monitoring rules, which, for example, imposes restrictions on moving resources between ring-fenced areas, key spending areas and categories of expenditure. Such movements are subject to Executive approval, which ensures that the Executive can manage the overall Budget position in line with the public expenditure rules and Budget Controls set by HM Treasury.

Departmental Accounting Officers

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the responsibility of departmental accounting officers in relation to discretionary budgets or unrestricted capital used by Ministers for the implementation of projects.

(AQW 17361/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The responsibilities of departmental accounting officers, including the effective financial management of all resources at their disposal, are set out in detail in Chapter 3 of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI), which was issued in June 2008.

Treasury: Statement of Funding Policy

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the level of participation by each Minister as part of the process on the consultation and agreement between the Executive, the Secretary of State and the Chief Secretary of the Treasury, on the Treasury Statement of Funding Policy: Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly, which was published in 2010.

(AQW 17383/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is the responsibility of the Finance Minister, acting on behalf of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, to consult on the Statement of Funding Policy with HM Treasury. The Policy itself is then formally agreed between the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Should HM Treasury or the other devolved administrations suggest significant revisions to the Statement of Funding Policy, I would of course draw these to the attention of Executive colleagues.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Whistle-blowing: Compensation

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money was spent on compensating whistle blowers in his Department in (i) 2009; (ii) 2010; and (iii) 2011.

(AQW 16966/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): No compensation was paid to whistleblowers in DHSSPS for any of the three years requested.

Fire and Rescue Service: Trade Fairs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on how many occasions since 2003 the Fire and Rescue Service, or its predecessor, has sent an Assistant Chief Fire Officer Technical and a Uniform Stores Manager to a trade fair where uniform and equipment were available for purchase; and to state the location of the trade fairs.

(AQW 16976/11-15)

Mr Poots: Between October 2006 and November 2012, the table below details the dates, purpose and locations of each trade fair attended.

Date	Destination	Flight Cost	Accommodation Cost	Purpose
18.10.06	London	£349.84	£366.00	Attending Emergency Services Show & Conference
28.03.07	Edinburgh	£118.92	£160.00	Attending Scottish Consortium Exhibition & Seminar
22.05.07	Birmingham	£317.88	£474.00	Attending Fire & Rescue Exhibition at NEC
17.09.07	Dusseldorf	£269.20	£1,032.00	Attending A&A Exhibition
27.11.07	Birmingham	£328.88	£700.00	Attending Emergency Services Show 2007
07.05.08	Galway	N/A	£324.60	Attending Fire Show
13.05.08	Birmingham	£506.89	£160.00	Attending Health & Safety Expo.
26.08.08	Liverpool	£152.99	£198.00	Attending Fire Exhibition
18.11.08	Birmingham	£862.62	£1,053.96	Attending Emergency Services Show 2008
27.08.08	Liverpool	£162.80	£396.00	Attending Fire Exhibition
11.05.09	Aberdeen/ Birmingham	£197.43	£203.12	Attending CFOA's Procurement meeting & Fire Show
03.11.09	Dusseldorf	£477.00	£682.02	Attending A&A Trade Fair
23.11.09	Birmingham	£626.80	£529.76	Attending Emergency Services Show 2009
24.11.09	Birmingham	£260.92	£160.00	Attending Emergency Services Show 2009
24.11.10	Birmingham	£924.25	£310.00	Attending Emergency Services Show 2010
05.07.11	Glasgow	£289.94	£264.99	Attending Scottish Emergency Services Show
05.07.11	Glasgow	£116.98	£95.00	Attending Scottish Emergency Services Show

Date	Destination	Flight Cost	Accommodation Cost	Purpose
23.11.11	Birmingham	£327.80	£152.00	Attending Emergency Services Show 2011
23.11.11	Birmingham	£327.92	£152.00	Attending Emergency Services Show 2011
21.11.12	Birmingham	£465.85	£218.95	Attending Emergency Services Show 2012

Fire and Rescue Service: Training Material

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the cost of the wood materials purchased by the Fire and Rescue Service over the last seven years for training purposes; (ii) the specification of the material; (iii) the wood materials that were delivered to the wrong specification; and (iv) whether the incorrect wood materials were returned or what disposal method was used.

(AQW 16978/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The cost of wood materials purchased by NIFRS in the last seven years for training purposes is £46, 352.50
- (ii) The specification of the material is outlined in the attached table.
- (iii) NIFRS has confirmed that none of the wood materials purchased and delivered were to the wrong specification.
- (iv) No incorrect wood materials were received.

SPECIFICATION OF WOOD MATERIAL ORDERED BY NIFRS

Item Description

- Xnon Pre-Cut Chipboard - Per Batch With Offcuts
- Xnon Pre-Cut Clipboards
- Xnon Pre-Cut Clipboard Sheets: 96" X 44" X Qty 40 96" X 21" X Qty 140 88" X 44"
- Xnon Batches Of Precut Chipboard With Off-Cuts
- Xnon Precut Chipboard With Off-Cuts
- 100 X 100Mm By 14 Foot Carcassing Timber
- 100 X 50Mm By 14 Foot Carcassing Timber
- 2440 X 1220 X 18Mm Sheets Of Three Quarter Plywood
- Supply 45 Sheets Of Osb Board 18Mm X 8Ft X 4Ft
- Supply 45 Sheets Of Osb Board 18Mm X 8Ft X4ft
- Supply 115 Sheets Of Osb Board Size 2440Mm X 1220Mm X 18Mm
- 4 X 4 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber
- 6 X 2 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber
- 4 X 2 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber
- 8 X 3 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber
- 8 X 4 Sheet Of Mtcc Plywood
- Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)
- Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)
- 2440 X 1220 X 18.0Mm Oriented Strand Board Osb2
- Tc047050t - Fsc Sht Fsc Mixed 70% Sa-Coc-002046 47X50mm Carcassing Treated 20/4.80
- Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)

Fire and Rescue Service: Overseas Visits

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the overseas visits made by the Chairman and senior staff of the Fire and Rescue Service in the last three years, including the purpose of the visits and the cost in flights, hotel accommodation and other related expenses.

(AQW 16980/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table, below, details the overseas visits made by the Chairman and senior staff of NIFRS from November 2009 to date.

Date	Rank	Destination	Flights	Accommodation (Not Inc Vat)	Any Other Costs	Purpose Of Journey
03.11.09	Stores Manager	Dusseldorf	£477.00	£454.48	£996.60	Attending A&A Trade Fair
	Assistant Chief Fire Officer					
29.01.10	Area Commander	Charlottesville USA	£716.79	£77.00	N/A	Attending a Federal Executive Institute
07.06.10	Assistant Chief Fire Officer	Leipzig	£906.91	N/A	N/A	Attending Fire Fighter Conference
	Transport Manager					
	Stores Manager					
31.08.11	Chairman	Newark USA	£703.70	N/A	£290.07	Attending WPFPG Events
22.08.11	CFO	New York	N/A	N/A	N/A	Attending WPFPG Events
24.09.10	Area Commander	Washington USA	£1,020.66	£107.89	N/A	Attending Leaders for a Democratic Society Programme
15.11.11	Transport Manager	Amsterdam	£230.96	£158.54	£49.53	Visit to Estepe Volvo Factory to inspect new Volvo Chassis
	Transport Engineer					

Notes: There have been no overseas visits during 2012 to date

- 1 Overseas visits are defined as anywhere outside the UK.
- 2 Other costs are deemed to be travel subsistence, taxis, accommodation
- 3 Senior staff includes Area Commander and above for uniformed staff and Principal Officer grade and above for Support staff.
- 4 CFO's visit to New York USA on 22/8/2011 was in a dual role, ie, as Vice-Chair of World Police & Fire Games 2013 Board and as NIFRS Chief Fire Officer. All travel and subsistence costs were met by WPFPG Board.

Waiting Times

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the waiting times for the treatment of patients across the health spectrum in comparison with when he came to office; and how this compares with the targets which are in place.

(AQW 17052/11-15)

Mr Poots: Progress has been made across a range of areas with particular focus required to benefit all users of the HSC. A comparison of waiting times at 30 June 2011 compared to 30 September 2012 is set out in the attached table. It should be noted that although a comparison is provided based on current targets, there will have been occasions where targets will have changed to reflect my priorities since coming into office.

Annex A**Assessment of performance against all targets and standards set out in the 2012/13 Commissioning Plan Direction****September 2012**

Target	Position at 30 June 2011	Position at 30 September 2012
From April 2012, 95% of patients, where clinically appropriate, wait no longer than 48 hours for inpatient treatment for hip fractures	77.5%	89.5%
From April 2012, ensure that 95% of patients urgently referred with a suspected cancer begin their first definitive treatment within 62 days.	82.6% treated within 62 days	September data has not been published. 81.9% treated within 62 days in June 2012.
95% of patients attending any Type 1, 2 or 3 A&E Department are either treated and discharged home, or admitted, within 4 hours of their arrival in the department	Type 1 – 79.3% Type 2 – 89.5% Type 3 – 99.9%	Type 1 – 77.7% Type 2 – 93.6% Type 3 – 99.9%
No patient attending any emergency department should wait longer than 12 hours	970 waiting longer than 12 hours	295 waiting longer than 12 hours
From April 2012, at least 50% of patients wait no longer than nine weeks for their first outpatient appointment, increasing to 60% by March 2013.	37.9% > 9wks	30.6% > 9wks
From April 2012, no patient will be waiting longer than 21 weeks for their first outpatient appointment, decreasing to 18 weeks by March 2013.	15,561 (13.2%) > 21 weeks	5,610 (5.2%) > 21 weeks
From April 2012, no patient waits longer than nine weeks for a diagnostic test (13 weeks for a daycase endoscopy).	6,504 (14.6%) > 9 wks 7,805(40.1%) > 13 wks	10,269 (19.8%) > 9 weeks 1,964 (17.4%) > 13 weeks
From April 2012, at least 50% of inpatients and daycases are treated within 13 weeks, increasing to 60% by March 2013.	40.3% > 13wks	40.1% > 13wks
From April 2012, no patient will be waiting longer than 36 weeks for inpatient or daycase treatment, decreasing to 30 weeks by March 2013.	2,859 (5.0%) > 36 weeks	2,029 (4.0%) > 36 weeks
From April 2012, no patient should wait longer than 9 months to commence NICE approved specialist therapies for rheumatoid arthritis, psoriatic arthritis or ankylosing spondylitis, decreasing to 3 months by September 2012.	290 > 3 months	1 > 3 months
From April 2012, no patient waits longer than nine weeks from referral to commencement of AHP treatment.	Month of June 2011: 4,111 waiting longer than 9 weeks.	Month of September 2012: 870 waiting longer than 9 weeks.
From April 2012, no patient waits longer than 9 weeks to access child and adolescent or adult mental health services; and 13 weeks for psychological therapies (any age).	Month of June 2011: 95 waiting longer than 9 weeks for mental health services; 202 waiting longer than 13 weeks for psychological therapies.	Month of September 2012: 521 waiting longer than 9 weeks for mental health services; 606 waiting longer than 13 weeks for psychological therapies.

Maternity Units: Capacity

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the capacity for deliveries in the maternity units of the (i) Altnagevlin; (ii) Causeway; and (iii) Antrim Area hospitals; and how many deliveries have there been in each maternity unit over the last year.

(AQW 17054/11-15)

Mr Poots: The births and funded capacity for deliveries at the maternity units at Altnagevlin, Causeway and Antrim are as follows –

Unit	Births 2011/12*1	Funded capacity for deliveries12/13
Altnagevlin	2949	2908
Causeway	1422	1421
Antrim	2616	2620

It should be noted that capacity within hospitals changes over time to meet demand. Capacity in a maternity unit cannot be seen in isolation from other hospital services. Key drivers on capacity within a maternity unit include: (a) the physical environment; (b) the staffing complement of both professional and administrative staff and skill mix; and, (c) the complexity of the pregnancy.

*1 – 11/12 is the latest whole year statistics available. It should be noted that the number of births does not equate to the number of deliveries as one delivery may result in a multiple birth.

Individual Funding Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people made an Independent Funding Request for drugs in the last three years; and how much money (i) was requested; and (ii) awarded.

(AQW 17075/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) that Information on individual funding requests (IFRs) for drugs has only been held centrally by the HSCB since 1 January 2012. Earlier information and analysis of IFRs for drugs could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. From 1 January 2012 to 30 September 2012 a total of 181 IFRs for drugs has been processed by the HSCB. IFRs do not always state the amount of funding sought and therefore it is not possible to quantify how much money these IFRs represent. However a total of £1.758m of funding has been identified to meet the costs associated with IFRs for drugs approved between January 2012 and 30 September 2012.

Legal Action: Northern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail (i) the number of legal actions the Northern Health and Social Care Trust has been involved in each of the past three years; (ii) the number of the actions that related to (a) clinical negligence; (b) social care negligence; (c) breach of contract; (d) employer liability; (e) personal injury; (f) judicial review; and (iii) the amount paid out in respect of compensation and legal and administrative costs involving each of these actions.

(AQW 17106/11-15)

Mr Poots: It is not possible to provide discrete information for clinical and social care negligence cases.

Table 1 details the number of clinical/social care negligence cases that remained open at 31st March for the last three years, as well as the number which were settled or closed for the Northern HSC Trust.

Table 1: Number of Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases Open, Settled and Closed at 31st March 2010-2012

Outcome of Cases at 31st March	2010	2011	2012
Open ¹	396	393	377
Settled	28	30	20
Closed	34	62	76
Cases Open at Any Stage During The Year ²	458	485	473

Source: DHSSPS CN1 Annual Information Return

- 1 The outcome of 29 cases was unknown at 31st March 2010. These have been included in the figure for cases which remained 'Open' at 31st March 2010
- 2 Cases Open at Any Stage During the Years refers to the period 1st April - 31st March

It should be noted it is not possible to combine these figures to provide a three year total as there may be overlap, for example, a case opened five years ago that is still currently open will be included in the figure for cases open at 31st March 2010 and also in the figure for cases open at 31st March 2012.

Table 2 below details the length of time cases had been open at 31st March 2012, by the outcome of the case.

Table 2: Number of Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases Open at any Stage During the Year, by Age of Case (2011/12)

Length of Time Open	Outcome at Year End			No. Open During Year
	Open	Settled	Closed	
Less than 1 year	74	0	6	80
1 year to < 3 years	154	3	18	175
3 years to < 5 years	85	9	25	119
5 years to < 10 years	54	8	26	88
10 years to < 15 years	9	0	1	10
15 years to < 20 years	1	0	0	1
Total	377	20	76	473

Source: DHSSPS CN1 Annual Information Return

Table 3 details the total payments for all clinical/social care negligence cases open during 2009/10 - 2011/12 in the Northern HSC Trust. It should be noted that costs associated with a case may not be paid out in the same financial year and therefore the information below refers to the amount paid on each open case up to and including 31st March of the respective year.

Table 3: Amount Paid on Clinical/Social Care Negligence Cases Open in the Northern HSC Trust at 31 March (2010 – 2012)

Total Payments at 31st March	2010	2011	2012
Damages Paid	£3,630,514	£1,290,790	£1,884,018
Defence Costs Paid	£451,361	£317,380	£276,634
Plaintiff Costs Paid	£659,834	£488,784	£478,146
Total	£4,741,709	£2,096,954	£2,638,798

Source: DHSSPS CN1 Annual Information Return

The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has provided the information below regarding cases of breach of contract, personal injury, employer liability and judicial review as this is not collated by the Department.

Breach of Contract and Personal Injury Claims are not captured as individual types of claim, therefore they have been noted in the tables below with the type of claim under which they are most likely to fall.

Table 4 sets out the number of new cases opened in each financial year.

Table 4: Number of new cases opened in each financial year

Financial Year	No. new cases opened		
	Occupier's Liability (includes breach of contract)	Employer's liability (includes personal injury)	Judicial Review
2009/2010	12	47	1
2010/2011	17	40	10
2011/2012	8	29	3

Table 5 shows the amounts paid in compensation, legal and administrative costs for each of these cases. The figures represent the amounts paid in each financial year irrespective of the year in which the case was opened.

Table 5: Amounts paid in compensation, legal and administrative costs

Financial Year	Costs	Occupier's Liability (includes breach of contract)	Employer's liability (includes personal injury)	Judicial Review
2009/2010	Compensation	£39,875	£93,749	-
	Legal / Admin	£32,179	£116,612	-
2010/2011	Compensation	£131,000	£215,886	-
	Legal / Admin	£77,303	£240,402	£5,239
2011/2012	Compensation	£21,500	£114,253	-
	Legal / Admin	£34,259	£128,167	£52,465

Benzodiazepines: Withdrawal Programmes

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16299/11-15, to detail (i) the protocols for benzodiazepine withdrawal programmes for GPs and pharmacists; (ii) the cost savings associated with the benzodiazepine withdrawal programme for each month of the past year; and (iii) the rights that patients have to opt out of the withdrawal programme.

(AQW 17122/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) The Belfast Health and Social Care Trust has advised that protocols for benzodiazepine withdrawal programmes are derived from professional guidelines which provide for a comprehensive suite of advice and support for delivering quality, safety, and efficiency in the use of benzodiazepine drugs.
- (ii) Data regarding the cost savings associated with the benzodiazepine withdrawal programme is not held centrally or collected routinely. The benefits of the programme are seen and measured against the targeted and steady reduction in benzodiazepine usage in those GP practices that have higher usage rates.
- (iii) The withdrawal programme is based on the fundamental premise that the patient's overall health and wellbeing will improve by reducing or withdrawing benzodiazepine where it is clinically appropriate to do so. It is the decision of the GP, in consultation with their patient, to decide on the most appropriate course of treatment for the patient and to prescribe the most appropriate medication to support the ongoing treatment of the patient.

Fire and Rescue Service: Trailers

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16292/11/15, (i) how many mowers and trailers were purchased in the last six years; (ii) to detail the date of purchase; (iii) the current location of the mowers and trailers; and (iv) in instances where they have been sold, to whom, and for how much, the mowers and trailers were sold.

(AQW 17132/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) No mowers were purchased by Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service in the last 6 years, 13 trailers were bought, as detailed below.
- (i) and (iii)

The table below details the purchase date and current location for each trailer purchased by NIFRS within the past 6 years.

Description	Location	Purchase Date
Race Trailer (Vehicle Transporter)	FRS Training Centre	15/07/2007
Generator Trailer	FRS Training Centre	31/03/2008
Boat Trailer	Urban Search & Rescue (Central)	14/04/2008
Gritting Trailers	FRS Headquarters	14/02/2011
Gritting Trailers	FRS Training Centre	14/02/2011
Cargo Trailer	FRS Training Centre	13/03/2011
Fuel Bowser	Western Headquarters	06/05/2011
Fuel Bowser	Southern	06/05/2011

Description	Location	Purchase Date
Fuel Bowser	Northern	06/05/2011
Fuel Bowser	Eastern	06/05/2011
Boat Trailer	Urban Search & Rescue (Central)	29/06/2011
Fuel Bowser	Enniskillen District	22/02/2012
Fuel Bowser	Lisburn District	22/02/2012

(iv) One trailer has been sold in the past 6 years, on 27 January 2009, via public auction at a sale receipt of £750.00.

Fire and Rescue Service: Missing Assets

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether any Fire and Rescue Service assets, including mowers and trailers have gone missing in the last five years; and whether they have been reported to the PSNI. **(AQW 17133/11-15)**

Mr Poots: The table below details assets reported missing in each financial year.

Financial year	Missing Asset
March 2008	None
March 2009	Generator stolen from Headquarters
	Theft of 18 scrap cars from various stations
March 2010	3 scrap cars from Crumlin Fire Station
	Theft of parts from scrap car
	Break in at officer's home and theft of NIFRS vehicle and contents
	Theft of 2 scrap cars from Keady Fire Station
	Theft of computer equipment in Western Area Command
March 2011	Theft of scrap car from Ballywalter Fire Station
March 2012	Theft of lead from Carrickfergus Fire Station roof
	Theft of standpipe shaft, chief branch, power pack, hooligan toolbar and compressor from Western Area Command
	Theft of computer notebook

In the current financial year NIFRS is currently considering allegations of theft in respect of a power washer, a ride on lawnmower and its associated 'tow behind' trailer, which were purchased prior to 2000.

It is Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service policy to report all thefts to the Police Service of Northern Ireland; all of the above thefts were reported to the PSNI.

Fire and Rescue Service: Wood Material

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16289/11-15 (i) to detail all the purchases of wood materials including the type, date and cost of the materials; (ii) the date of the disposal; and (iii) to provide confirmation that the materials were used for the purposes intended. **(AQW 17134/11-15)**

Mr Poots:

- (i) The type, date and cost of wood materials purchased by Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are detailed in the attached table.
- (ii) No wood materials have been disposed of.
- (iii) The majority of wood materials were used for the purposes intended except for a small amount of wood which became damp during storage and could not be used in a controlled burning situation. Instead it was used for small building projects within NIFRS eg shelves and partitions.

Specification of Wood Material ordered by NIFRS

Date	Item Description	Goods
08/03/2006	Xnon Pre-Cut Chipboard - Per Batch With Offcuts - As Per Your Quotation Q2940	6300.00
08/12/2008	Xnon Please Supply 1 Batch Of Pre-Cut Clipboards To Nifrs Training Centre,	1925.00
12/06/2009	Xnon Pre-Cut Clipboard Sheets: 96" X 44" X Qty 40 96" X 21" X Qty 140 88" X 44"	1500.00
13/08/2009	Xnon Batches Of Precut Chipboard With Off-Cuts As Per Your Quotation Q3164	5775.00
25/09/2009	Xnon Precut Chipboard With Off-Cuts As Per Your Quotation Q3164 Dated 8Th August	1925.00
06/09/2007	Xnon Sheet Of 9Mm Wbp Plywood	180.00
06/09/2007	Xnon 4.8M Of 4" X 11/2" R.S.	81.60
06/09/2007	Xnon 2.4M Of 4" X 11/2" R.S.	102.00
06/09/2007	Xsvc Delivery Charge	10.00
26/01/2006	Xnon Blockboard 8' X 4'	183.60
25/09/2006	Xnon 'K' Quality Sundella Board	75.00
02/03/2006	Xnon Blockboard - 8' X 4' X 3/4"	76.50
02/03/2006	Xnon Plywood - 8' X 4' X 3/8" - Quote Ref Rq9089	38.04
05/10/2010	Supply 45 Sheets Of Osb Board 18Mm X 8Ft X 4Ft	518.85
07/10/2010	Supply 45 Sheets Of Osb Board 18Mm X 8Ft X4ft	618.75
09/11/2010	Supply 115 Sheets Of Osb Board Size 2440Mm X 1220Mm X 18Mm	1345.50
09/08/2011	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)	3937.50
07/10/2011	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets) For Delivery To Nifrs Training Centre, 79 Boucher Crescent, Belfast.	3937.50
20/12/2011	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)	3937.50
02/03/2012	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)	3937.50
27/06/2012	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets)	3937.50
08/08/2012	Supply Of Oriented Strandboard (350 Sheets) Delivery To 79 Boucher Crescent, Between 28 And 31 August 2012	3937.50
07/02/2011	Sundela K Quality 2440X1220x9mm Quantity 5	182.50
07/02/2011	Mdf 2440X1220 15Mm	13.68
18/02/2011	Supply 1 Nr Partition Wall With Door And Associated Ironmongery, In The Ladies S	310.00
27/10/2010	Door Frame Whitewood 108 X 32Mm 6/5.1 (X30.60m)	49.15
27/10/2010	Doorstop Re Redwood 44 X 12Mm 6/4.3 (X 25.80M)	14.16
27/10/2010	Timber Softwood Rs 75 X 38 6/2.4 (X 14.40M)	12.96
27/10/2010	Doorstop Re Redwood 44 X 12Mm 24/4.3 (X103.20m)	55.72
27/10/2010	6P White Panel Doors 2032 X 813 X 44Mm Quantity 1	28.68
27/10/2010	Timber Softwood Rs 75 X 38Mm 10/3.6 35/2.7 (X 130.5M)	110.92
27/10/2010	Door White 6P 1981 X 762 X 35 Quantity 6	123.16
30/11/2010	Mdf 2440 X 1220 15Mm Quantity 3	36.93
30/11/2010	Mdf 2440 X 1200 6Mm Quantity 6	41.36
30/11/2010	Plywood Wbp 2440 X 1220 18Mm	20.99

Date	Item Description	Goods
30/11/2010	Timber Softwood Rs 75 X 38 8/2.4 Quantity 19.200	16.32
28/03/2011	Door Ply Internal Firecheck 2040X826x44mm (X2)	64.89
13/09/2010	Mdf 2440 X 1220 12Mm X 2	25.16
28/09/2010	Doorstop Re Redwood - 20.4	11.19
28/09/2010	Plywood Wbp X 1	23.33
28/09/2010	Timber Softwood Wallplate - 71.4	120.80
14/03/2011	Attend Central Fs To Install Partition Wall Between Columns In The Mess Area. 1	370.00
13/09/2010	Plywood Wbp 18Mm X 3	62.99
24/02/2010	100 X 100Mm By 14 Foot Carcassing Timber	331.70
24/02/2010	100 X 50Mm By 14 Foot Carcassing Timber	144.70
24/02/2010	2440 X 1220 X 18Mm Sheets Of Three Quarter Plywood	636.00
21/01/2011	4 X 4 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber	500.00
21/01/2011	6 X 2 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber	180.00
21/01/2011	4 X 2 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber	90.00
21/01/2011	8 X 3 X 4.8M Length C16 Construction Grade Timber	38.00
21/01/2011	8 X 4 Sheet Of Mtcc Plywood	465.00
19/10/2011	2440 X 1220 X 18.0Mm Oriented Strand Board Osb2	345.80
19/10/2011	Tc047050t - Fsc Sht Fsc Mixed 70% Sa-Coc-002046 47X50mm Carcassing Treated 20/4.80	73.20
10/02/2011	Far Eastern Plywood Ext H/Wood Marine Grade 2440X1220x12mm	117.48
13/05/2010	Par White Wood 44 X 19Mm 12/4.2 Quantity 50.40	29.48
13/05/2010	Doorstop Re Redwood 44 X 12Mm 6/4.2 Quantity 25.20	12.25
04/05/2010	Blockboard Standard Qty 6	194.70
28/06/2010	Door Ply Internal Firecheck 1981 X 762 X 44	32.47
28/06/2010	Hardboard Standard 8 X 4 X 3.2Mm	5.05
28/06/2010	Plywood Wbp 2440 X 1220 18Mm	19.24
28/06/2010	Pine Standard Half Round 21 X 8 Quantity 6	12.03
25/05/2010	Door Frame Whitewood 132 X 32Mm 2/5.1 X 10.20	22.07
26/07/2010	Mdf 2440 X 1220 18Mm Quantity 2	28.52
26/07/2010	Plywood Wbp 2440 X 1220 18Mm Quantity 4	76.96
26/07/2010	Conti Board White 8 X 24Inches X 15Mm Quantity 2	21.75
26/07/2010	Modesty Block White Quantity 20	2.00
26/07/2010	Mdf 2440 X 1220 15Mm Quantity 2	27.36
05/10/2010	9 Inch X 4 Inch X 67 1/2 Inch Mahogany Sills X 2	160.00
30/11/2010	Par White Wood 44X19mm 12/3.9 Quantity 46.800	26.53
21/12/2010	1 X Mdf 2440 X 1220 9Mm	56.70
07/02/2011	Plywood Wbp 2440X1220 18Mm Quantity 2	43.08
02/03/2011	Centurion Modesty Blocks White Pk/6 X4	2.60
28/03/2011	Timber Softwood Rs 75X47 2/4.8 (X 9.6)	11.57
28/03/2011	Door Frame Whitewood 108X32mm 2/4.2 (X 8.4)	14.28
28/03/2011	Par White Wood 44X19mm 12/4.2 (X 50.4)	28.57

Date	Item Description	Goods
28/03/2011	Timber Redwood Se 44X12mm 10/4.2 (X 42)	23.05
28/03/2011	Timber Softwood Rs 75X47 12/2.4 (X28.8)	34.73
28/03/2011	Plywood Wbp 2440X1220 9Mm (X10)	147.80
23/02/2010	Supply And Fit Zebrano Ambre Partitions, 1 Nr Range Of Two Cubicles Between Wall	1990.00
07/02/2011	Plywood Sheeting T And G 2440X1200mm Quantity 5	103.15
07/02/2011	Timber Softwood Rs 150X47 1/3.9 Quantity 3.9	9.37
26/02/2010	Par White Wood 144 X 19 1/4.2M Priced Per Metre Quantity 4.2	6.15
26/02/2010	Doorstop Re Redwood 44X12mm 4/4.5 Priced Per Metre Quantity 18	8.75
26/02/2010	Door Frame Whitewood 108 X 32Mm 2/5.1M Lengths Priced Per Metre Quantity 10.2	17.35
26/02/2010	Par White Wood 44 X 19 5/4.2 Quantity 21	12.28
26/02/2010	Door Ply Internal Presealed 1981 X 762 X 40 Quantity 1	28.15
13/09/2010	Door Frame Redwood External X 1	26.20
23/08/2011	2440X1220x18mm Plywood	57.51
21/09/2011	2440X1220x18mm Sheet Plywood	19.17
21/09/2011	2440X1220x25mm Sheet Plywood	26.50
19/10/2011	2440X1220x25 Mm Hardwood	80.13
19/10/2011	94X44 W/Wood Pld	79.60
01/11/2011	2400X1220x25 Mm Plywood	26.71
01/11/2011	2440X1220x18 Mm Plywood	38.34
01/11/2011	94X44 W/Wood Pld	79.68
01/12/2011	2440X1220x25 Mm Hardwood	26.71
01/12/2011	94X44mm W Wood	39.80
07/02/2012	2440X1220x25 Hardwood Faced	53.82
07/02/2012	94X44 W/Wood Ply	41.34
06/03/2012	2440X1220 X18mm Hardwood Faced	18.58
06/03/2012	107X32 W/Wood Ply	9.81
06/03/2012	94X44 W/Wood Ply	68.28
06/03/2012	2440X1220x18 Industrial Mdf	74.95
01/05/2012	2440X1220x25 Mm Hardwood Faced Plywood	107.64
01/05/2012	44X12 W/Wood Architrave S.R.E.	2.42
22/05/2012	94X44 W/Wood Ply	136.56
22/05/2012	2440X1200x25mm Hardwood Faced Plywood	53.82
22/05/2012	2440X1220x18mm Hardwood Faced Plywood	37.16
27/06/2011	Plywood 2440X1220x25mm	79.50
07/07/2011	2440X1220x25mm Hardface Plywood Ce2+	79.50
07/02/2011	Plywood Wbp 2440X1220 9Mm Quantity 6	88.68
28/03/2011	Hardboard Standard 8X4x3.2mm (X2)	11.90
28/03/2011	Mdf 2440X1220 6Mm (X1)	7.66
28/03/2011	Mdf 2440X1220 9Mm (X2)	18.90
28/03/2011	Plywood Wbp 2440X1220 18Mm (X3)	64.62

Date	Item Description	Goods
06/07/2012	Jumbo Pallet Box 1100 X 900 X 800 Ref Quote Craig Holborn	552.50
18/07/2012	20 Wooden Used Pallets Size 1200X1000	85.00
		54,197.59

Staff: Vacancy Control

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is a Vacancy Control Policy still in operation in the Health Service; and how many permanent posts have remained unfilled since its introduction.

(AQW 17165/11-15)

Mr Poots: Recruitment matters including the determination of appropriate staffing levels are a matter for Health and Social Care Trusts taking into account service need and available resources.

HSC Trusts have advised that vacancy control measures are applied in specific situations, for example, where staff displacement is anticipated, vacancy controls may be introduced to safeguard employment. HSC Trusts ensure that the duration of vacancy controls is proportionate to the level of change required and the time taken to complete the change. In addition, where front line posts need to be filled for service provision these are processed without delay.

As vacancy control measures are applied as and when the situation dictates rather than routinely, the information requested, regarding the number of posts unfilled, is not available.

Interpreters: Cost

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the annual cost of providing interpreters in each Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 17181/11-15)

Mr Poots: The annual cost of providing interpreters in each Health and Social Care Trust is set out in the table below. The information relates to the latest data available which is for 2011/12.

HSC Trust	2011/12 £
Belfast	527,467
Northern	293,372
Southern	919,547
South Eastern	110,507
Western	196,299
NIAS	772
Total	2,047,964

Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Evacuation Procedures

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, following the recent fire at Altnagelvin Hospital, whether he will review the evacuation procedures for seriously ill patients to other hospitals.

(AQW 17189/11-15)

Mr Poots: As a result of the recent Fire at Altnagelvin and the successful implementation by the Trust of their major incident plan, I have asked all HSC bodies to review with immediate effect their fire evacuation plans for each facility to ensure that they incorporate any lessons learned from the Altnagelvin incident including the procedures to be followed during evacuation for the movement of seriously ill patients to other hospitals if needed.

Whooping Cough

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what public awareness projects he has planned on whooping cough; and what provisions are in place to deal with the outbreak of the cough in the last few months.

(AQW 17197/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since January 2012, regular press releases from the Public Health Agency have alerted the public to the whooping cough outbreak and the importance of ensuring that vaccines are offered and administered at the correct time to infants and young children as part of the routine childhood immunisation programme. This message has also been reiterated to GPs.

The Public Health Agency has developed information for the public, including leaflets, posters and a factsheet about whooping cough and the vaccination programme. These have been distributed to GPs and Trusts and are also available on the Public Health Agency's website at <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/whooping-cough>.

The PHA also issued an alert letter to all GPs informing them of the outbreak, advising them to have a high index of suspicion when seeing patients with symptoms, and how to manage a case including reporting it. Correct procedures for dealing with cases requiring admission to hospital has also been highlighted to all Trusts. Standard operating procedures are in place within the Public Health Agency so that cases of whooping cough are investigated for vulnerable contacts and that control measures, including antibiotics and vaccination are offered to contacts when appropriate.

In October 2012 I introduced a temporary immunisation programme, which while aimed at pregnant women who have reached 28 weeks or more of their pregnancy, is intended to protect their children from birth until they are old enough to receive the vaccine themselves. All pregnant women are now being routinely offered vaccination by their local GP once they have reached week 28 or more of their pregnancy.

Marie Stopes Clinic

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the Marie Stopes Clinic, Belfast will be regulated; and whether Marie Stopes Clinics in England are regulated by the Care Quality Commission.
(AQW 17248/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department has sought details through RQIA of the full range of services and medical professionals providing services at MSI, in order to determine whether this clinic would be regulated under the definition in the The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

The Department has also sought legal advice based on the information received and I have asked my officials to review the current regulations as they apply to such establishments and if not applicable, whether they require amendment to ensure that they provide the appropriate safeguards as intended by legislation.

In England the Care Quality Commission (CQC) operates under a much wider regulatory regime applying to the delivery of health and social services, including high street services, whereas the RQIA regulates establishments and agencies under the Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. In short our legislation is different and the focus of the regulation differs accordingly.

Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what bearing the Secretary of State for Health's decision to review the recommendations of the UK Safe and Sustainable Review Team will have on the consultation on the future of Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services in Northern Ireland.
(AQW 17249/11-15)

Mr Poots: The review announced by the Secretary of State for Health in England has no immediate relevance to the review being undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board on paediatric cardiac surgical services in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland public consultation is therefore continuing as planned and I expect to reach a decision on the provision of this service for the population of Northern Ireland in early 2013.

Trolley Waits: Ulster Hospital

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients had to wait on trolleys in the Ulster Hospital for a period of (i) less than 4 hours; and (ii) more than 4 hours in each month of the winter of 2011.
(AQW 17255/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on monthly emergency care waiting times, including performance against the 4 hour Ministerial target, is published on a quarterly basis and is available to view or download from:

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/emergency_care-3/emergency_care-monthly_waiting_times.htm

Ulster Hospital: A&E Waiting Time

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what additional steps he is taking to improve performance on the four hour Accident and Emergency waiting time target for the Ulster Hospital.
(AQW 17256/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Emergency Department Improvement Action Group which was established in April 2012 has been working with all Health and Social Care Trusts to improve emergency department waiting times and the patient experience. In October 2012, 74.7% of people attending the Ulster Hospital Emergency Department were treated and discharged home or admitted within four hours.

The South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has a comprehensive reform and modernisation programme in place to meet the increased demand for emergency care at the Ulster Hospital. The Trust has opened 40 extra beds, increased staffing in the Emergency Department, and increased services and community capacity. The Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)

is monitoring the position closely with the Trusts and I look to the HSCB to continue its work with the Trusts to ensure that a focus remains on improving the performance of our emergency departments.

S2 Certificates

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether under S2, formerly Article 112, Health Service patients can be referred to private clinics or private surgeons outside the United Kingdom.

(AQW 17257/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the S2 (formerly E112) system patients are not entitled to access private clinics or private surgeons. As such no S2 certificates have been issued to patients for private care.

S2 Certificates

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service patients have been referred to private clinics and private surgeons outside the United Kingdom under S2, formerly Article 112, in the last five years.

(AQW 17258/11-15)

Mr Poots: Under the S2 (formerly E112) system patients are not entitled to access private clinics or private surgeons. As such no S2 certificates have been issued to patients for private care.

Adoption: Siblings

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many applications have there been to adopt siblings in the past five years; and how many have been approved, including intercountry applications.

(AQW 17305/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Respite Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the process and criteria by which respite care is allocated.

(AQW 17322/11-15)

Mr Poots: Respite care is essentially a break for the carer from their caring role and is a service which a carer, or sometimes others, can request directly from their Trust key worker. It may also be suggested by the key worker. The key criterion for the allocation of respite is an assessment that respite is necessary to sustain the carer in their care-giving role.

A report by the Health and Social Care Board last year on respite care services strongly encouraged the use of a formal carer's assessment as part of the process of allocating respite. The Board is now requiring Trusts to make this a mandatory step, with the proviso that professional judgement can be applied in individual cases if a carer's assessment is refused by the service user.

Adult Social Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of how the funding allocated for adult social care is used.

(AQW 17323/11-15)

Mr Poots: While the levels of funding provided towards adult social care are just sufficient at present, these are coming under increasing pressure. Given the UK wide funding outlook, together with the demographic changes which will have an impact on adult social care for decades to come, the challenges ahead require careful consideration. It is for that reason that I have embarked upon a three stage process of reform to establish the future direction and funding of care and support. In September I launched the first step of that reform with the publication of a discussion document setting out the challenges that the system is facing. My Department is currently facilitating a public debate around the future of care and support. This consultation will run for 6 months rather than the usual 3 months to ensure that as many people as possible are given the opportunity to contribute to the reform process and have their views heard. I am strongly urging everyone to engage in that debate and to let us know your thoughts and opinions on how we face the challenges ahead.

Missed Appointments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many hospital appointments in each Health and Social Care Trust have been missed in the last twelve months.

(AQW 17334/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information on the number of consultant led appointments missed by the patient (Did Not Attend), in each Health and Social Care Trust in each quarter of the last twelve months, is shown in the table below.

Quarter ending	Number of Missed Appointments, by HSC Trust					Northern Ireland
	Belfast	Northern	Southern	South Eastern	Western	
December '11	18,739	4,329	4,968	6,214	6,056	40,306
March '12	19,184	4,649	4,914	5,851	6,283	40,881
June '12p	18,862	4,242	4,807	6,013	6,304	40,228
September '12 ^p	18,600	3,915	4,852	5,704	5,880	38,951
Total	75,385	17,135	19,541	23,782	24,523	160,366

Source: Quarterly Outpatient Activity Return (QOAR) Part 1

P Data that relate to the June 2012 and September 2012 quarters are currently provisional

Prompt Payment

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others. (AQW 17364/11-15)

Mr Poots: The prompt payment performance of the Department's arm's-length bodies (ALBs) for the 2012/13 year to date, and for the prior year, is shown in the following table:-

Department's Arm's-length Bodies (ALBs) Prompt Payment 2011/12 and 2012/13		
ALB	% of bills paid within 30 days or other agreed terms for the 2011/12 year	% of bills paid within 30 days or other agreed terms for the 2012/13 year (up to the end of October 2012)
	%	%
Northern Trust	93.88	93.00
Belfast Trust	92.00	89.30
Western Trust	96.20	93.80
South Eastern Trust	92.60	91.70
NIAS	97.50	93.10
Southern Trust	91.20	92.70
HSCB	91.70	93.70
BSO	95.70	92.80
NIBTS	96.20	97.30
NIFRS	95.40	95.45
NIGALA	98.70	99.00
NIMDTA	93.72	91.60
NIPEC	98.70	96.70
NISCC	86.00	92.80
PCC	96.80	96.90
PHA	92.32	97.10
RQIA	96.20	96.10

Information on prompt payment by sector is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. Notwithstanding this, no sector is given preferential treatment and the 30 day prompt payment target applies equally to all suppliers.

Alcohol: Minimum Price

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress is being made to set a minimum price for a unit of alcohol.

(AQW 17368/11-15)

Mr Poots: The price at which some supermarkets sell alcohol, sometimes cheaper than bottled water, is damaging to individuals, communities, and families. Therefore I am determined to take action to address alcohol's affordability, and I believe this is vital given that alcohol is 67% more affordable now than it was in 1980.

My Department has been working closely with the Department for Social Development, who led a joint consultation on the principle of introducing minimum unit pricing in 2011. We are now commissioning research to model the likely impact of introducing minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland. This research is essential as it will help inform our future decisions in this area, and allow us to bring forward proposals that will have a proportionate and positive impact on physical and mental health and wellbeing in Northern Ireland. We will also continue to watch developments in Scotland, England and Europe very closely.

However, minimum unit pricing is only one part of our approach to this issue, and it is important we take a range of actions, including education and early intervention and providing services for those to need additional support, to address alcohol misuse across the population.

Ambulance Station: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety where is North Down's nearest emergency ambulance station.

(AQW 17374/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the Member to the answer I gave on 26 November 2012 to AQW 16557/11-15.

Transforming Your Care: Consultation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of representations by affected interests, including the Causeway Hospital Campaign, whether he will extend the consultation period for Transforming Your Care by a period of 30 days.

(AQW 17377/11-15)

Mr Poots: The public consultation on the proposed changes emerging from Transforming Your Care is to run from 9 October to 15 January, representing a 14 week consultation period to account for the Christmas holiday period.

The public consultation process includes provision of information via a dedicated website and the ability to comment by electronic means and via written submissions. A number of public meetings have also been organised by the HSCB across Northern Ireland to provide the opportunity for local communities to contribute.

Following the conclusion of the consultation and decisions on the way forward, there will be further consultation exercises on significant service changes which will provide the opportunity for service users and the wider public to have their say on such changes as they emerge over time.

I do not believe that in light of the arrangements already in place that it is necessary to extend the current consultation period.

Ministerial Co-ordination Group on Suicide Prevention

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 16461/11-15, whether he plans to put East Belfast's recent cluster of suicides on the agenda for the next meeting of the Ministerial Co-Ordination Group.

(AQW 17404/11-15)

Mr Poots: As explained in AQW 15582/11-15, there is no evidence, through the Sudden Death notification system, of a spike in suspected deaths by suicide in the East Belfast area over recent months. I may, however, consider including the media coverage of community group interviews on this issue as an agenda item. Some of the coverage referred to a "suicide epidemic in East Belfast". Evidence shows that this type of sensationalist reporting can normalise suicide and lead to adverse outcomes for already vulnerable people.

Whooping Cough

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures his Department has put in place to minimise the threat of Whooping Cough.

(AQW 17466/11-15)

Mr Poots: Since January 2012, regular press releases from the Public Health Agency have alerted the public to the whooping cough outbreak and the importance of ensuring that vaccines are offered and administered at the correct time to infants and young children as part of the routine childhood immunisation programme. This message has also been reiterated to GPs.

In Northern Ireland we continue to achieve very high vaccine uptake rates – over 97% for children up to 12 months for the whooping cough vaccine, which had ensured that since the introduction of the routine immunisation programme the number of cases of whooping cough had fallen to very low numbers. Therefore while the number of whooping cough cases has now increased dramatically compared to recent years this is still much lower than the number of cases that occurred prior to the introduction of routine immunisation.

The Public Health Agency has developed information for the public, including leaflets, posters and a factsheet about whooping cough and the vaccination programme. These have been distributed to GPs and Trusts and are also available on the Public Health Agency's website at <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/whooping-cough>.

The PHA also issued an alert letter to all GPs informing them of the outbreak, advising them to have a high index of suspicion when seeing patients with symptoms, and how to manage a case including reporting it. Correct procedures for dealing with cases requiring admission to hospital has also been highlighted to all Trusts. Standard operating procedures are in place within the Public Health Agency so that cases of whooping cough are investigated for vulnerable contacts and that control measures, including antibiotics and vaccination are offered to contacts when appropriate.

In October 2012 I introduced a temporary immunisation programme, which while aimed at pregnant women who have reached 28 weeks or more of their pregnancy, is intended to protect their children from birth until they are old enough to receive the vaccine themselves. All pregnant women are now being routinely offered vaccination by their local GP once they have reached week 28 or more of their pregnancy.

Department of Justice

Case Involving Caroline Barnes

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 12905/11-15, whether the final costs in this case have been submitted to the Legal Services Commission, and if so, to provide the figures.
(AQW 16847/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has not received any claims for payment in this case subsequent to the answer I gave in AQW 12905/11-15.

Offender Levy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether fines are being reduced, as sentence for convictions, to accommodate the Offender Levy and for his assessment of this practice.
(AQW 16848/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Offender Levy does not form part of the sentence imposed by the court, rather it is an additional amount set at the point of sentencing and applied on top of the sentence given.

Specific statutory provision has been included in levy provisions of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, whereby the court must not reduce a fine on account of the levy, except where it has determined that the offender has insufficient means to pay both. This accords with provision made in the Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland) Order 1994, which allows a fine to be reduced by the court when a compensation order has been given in addition to a fine and the offender has the inability to pay both.

A formal evaluation to assess the levy's operation is to be undertaken once the system has had adequate time to bed in. The effectiveness of the levy's imposition is a specific area we would wish to consider as part of the evaluation exercise.

Dungannon Courthouse: Delays

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice why Dungannon Courthouse is the slowest at progressing Crown Court cases, and the reasons for the delays.
(AQW 16875/11-15)

Mr Ford: In 2011/12, Fermanagh and Tyrone was the best performing of the 7 Court divisions.

In the period from July to September 2012 the average waiting time from Committal to Hearing in the Crown Court in Fermanagh and Tyrone, which includes Dungannon sittings, was 90 days compared to the Northern Ireland average of 143 days.

Misconduct in Public Office

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many cases of misconduct in public office are in the magistrates court system, broken down by court division.
(AQW 16930/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 20 November, there were no cases of misconduct in public office before the Magistrates' Court.

Supporting Prisoners at Risk Programme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16111/11-15, to detail (i) the number of staff who have received Supporting Prisoner at Risk training and Prisoner at Risk awareness sessions, broken down by the following grades (a) basic grade officer; (b) senior officer; (c) principal officer; (d) governor; (e) health care officer; and (f) nursing officer; (ii) who conducted the awareness sessions; and (iii) the content and duration of each session.

(AQW 16931/11-15)

Mr Ford: From available records, the numbers of staff who have received Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) training are included in the table below:

Staff Grades	SPAR Training Numbers
Basic Grade Officer	272
Senior Officer	75
Principal Officer	24
Governor	17
Hospital Officer	4
Nursing Officer	18

Initially, this training was delivered by staff training officers in half day sessions and included examples of good practice, and the implications of not adhering to this; case studies; and the completion of documentation. Following a review, this training has been increased to a full day's course and now includes participation in role play and assessments.

Prior to the introduction of SPAR training in May 2009, staff training officers provided briefing/awareness sessions on Prisoner at Risk 1(PAR1) with each session lasting approximately two hours. I am unable to provide a total figure of the staff trained in this area.

Issues covered by these briefing sessions included ensuring that staff were familiar with their responsibilities in relation to the care of those identified as being at risk; the processes and procedures required for monitoring prisoners on PAR1; and log book completion.

Bail Hostels

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to bail hostels such as that run by the Sisters of Charity in Armagh, whether they have been inspected as suitable premises to remand men accused of serious offences, given the close proximity of some of the hostels to schools and there being no facilities for electronic tagging.

(AQW 16979/11-15)

Mr Ford: There are no bail hostels in Northern Ireland. There are six premises, accredited by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and approved by the Probation Board, for the accommodation of individuals on bail or post-custodial licence who require additional levels of supervision. These approved premises are subject to regular inspection by Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland.

The majority of defendants seek to be bailed to their own home address or to that of family or friends. Individuals who do not have any accommodation may be granted bail to approved premises or, where the court believes that additional supervision measures are not required, to other residential properties managed by voluntary sector organisations providing services to homeless persons. I understand that those organisations which apply to be a 'Supporting People' provider are accredited and monitored by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The granting of bail is a judicial decision and I am therefore unable to comment on determinations made by the court in specific cases. Where electronic monitoring is imposed by the court as a condition of bail this will be implemented provided the property owner or manager has consented to its installation and the structure of the building does not impede the transmission of the electronic signal.

Maghaberry Prison: Roe House Protest

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether any infections or outbreaks of illnesses have been reported at Roe House, Maghaberry Prison, since the commencement of the republican separated prisoners' dirty protest; and whether tests are carried out to monitor the potential for germs and organisms, including e-coli.

(AQW 16981/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have not been any reports of infections or outbreaks of illness since the commencement of the dirty protest by separated republican prisoners in Roe House, Maghaberry Prison.

Five bacterial tests are conducted on a monthly basis. These are C1 perfringens; E.coli; Enterococci; Total coliform; and Total viable count.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Counselling

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) whether the Northern Ireland Prison Service has paid for counselling services for the partner of a prisoner being held in the Pre-Release Unit; (ii) the number and dates of the sessions that took place; (iii) the total cost of providing the counselling, including travel costs for the partner; (iv) who authorised the counselling; and (v) whether the provision of the counselling services in such instances is approved by the Prison Service, including where information on this provision is available.

(AQW 16983/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) is aware that a prisoner at the Prisoner Assessment Unit attended a programme of psychotherapy, which also involved his wife. This reflected a court decision to defer sentencing his wife pending her undergoing psychotherapy. This decision was endorsed by the Life Sentence Review Commissioners.
- (ii) The psychotherapy programme for the prisoner ran between 2007 and 2009 during which time the prisoner's wife attended approximately 65 sessions which comprised joint and separate sessions.
- (iii) The cost of the clinical sessions involving the prisoner's wife, as well as her travel costs to the Prisoner Assessment Unit, was approximately £8,000.
- (iv) A NIPS-led Life Sentenced Prisoner Multi-Disciplinary Team which is made up of senior NIPS governors, clinical and forensic consultants and managers from the Probation Board, approved the involvement of the prisoner's wife in the psychotherapeutic treatment programme which was endorsed by the Parole Commissioners Northern Ireland as being important to minimising the risk of marital violence to both spouses or violence being directed towards others.
- (v) The provision of these services was determined by the multi disciplinary team taking into account the risk assessment and the need to ensure that interventions were in place to help the prisoner address his offending behaviour.

Maghaberry Prison: Hidden Camera

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 15977/11-15, to detail (i) whether the prisoner was in possession of the watch on admission to HMP Maghaberry and whether the watch was checked for recording devices before the prisoner was permitted to retain it; or (ii) whether the watch was acquired after the prisoner's admission and how it was brought into the prison.

(AQW 16987/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The prisoner was not found to be in possession of the watch on his admission to prison.
- (ii) It is believed the watch was acquired after his admission, having been brought in to the prison by a person unknown at this time.

Personal Protection Weapons: Retiring Prison Officers

Mr Elliott asked the Minister of Justice what action he is taking to ensure that prison officers who are retiring and leaving the Prison Service will be given assistance to obtain a personal protection weapon if they have made an application to the PSNI.

(AQW 17001/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question relates to the personal security of prison staff it would not be appropriate to provide specific details. However, I can confirm that the Northern Ireland Prison Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland have agreed revised arrangements to address staff concerns regarding obtaining personal protection weapons following retirement.

Desertcreat College: Biofuel

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Justice what assessment was carried out, during the tender process, on the potential use of biofuel at the Northern Ireland Community Safety College at Desertcreat.

(AQW 17011/11-15)

Mr Ford: The design team investigated various forms of biofuel during the design development stage, including biomass and biogas. It was subsequently determined that biomass was the most appropriate form of biofuel for this site, considering the environment we are creating.

Approximately 18 acres of the site will be used to grow biomass material, which will be available for harvesting by the appointed supplier.

The final design has all heating on site provided by biomass boilers fuelled by wood chips. There will be a back-up oil fired boiler system in case of failure.

Prison Service: Staff Canteen Closures

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) when and why the messes serving prisons were closed; and (ii) what assessment was made of the security implications of the decision.

(AQW 17025/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service ceased providing subsidised canteen facilities on 1 May 2010 due to the very low uptake of the service which led to a sizeable monetary loss. Vending machine facilities were made available, but the contractors withdrew this service at Magilligan and Hydebank Wood as the facilities were not being used.

A security assessment was not deemed necessary at that time as facilities are available within each prison for staff during meal breaks.

Prison Service: Staff Social Club Closures

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) when and why the social clubs serving prisons were closed; and (ii) what assessment was made of the security implications of the decision.

(AQW 17026/11-15)

Mr Ford: The staff social clubs at Magilligan and Maghaberry Prisons were closed with effect from 31 March 2011. This decision was based on the findings of an Internal Audit report. The social club at Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre and Prison had already closed some time prior to this.

At that time it was acknowledged that a security threat remained but as it was considerably reduced the need to retain the staff social clubs had diminished. The Director General concluded that it was no longer appropriate or necessary to maintain these clubs.

Downpatrick Courthouse

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the plans for Downpatrick Court House.

(AQW 17038/11-15)

Mr Ford: Downpatrick Court House will be considered within the Estate Strategy my officials are developing which I announced on 22 November 2012.

Maghaberry Prison: Hidden Camera

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 15977/11-15, whether any of the content recovered from the recording device has presented a security risk.

(AQW 17047/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that no security risk has been identified.

G8 Summit: Cost of Policing

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether he is expecting a contribution from the national government to cover the costs of policing the G8 Summit.

(AQW 17056/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am aware that the G8 Summit will place additional pressure on the policing budget. My officials will be in discussions with the relevant funding organisations to agree who will provide the necessary funds.

PSNI Station Closures

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice whether the PSNI can retain any monies from the sale of closed PSNI stations.

(AQW 17062/11-15)

Mr Ford: PSNI may retain any monies from the sale of surplus police stations up to the level of their receipts line budget, provided there is sufficient PSNI capital spend to offset the receipts. Any potential additional monies derived from the sale of police stations may be retained by applying through monitoring rounds, subject to DFP approval.

Death in Custody: Disciplinary Action

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the Prisoner Ombudsman's report into the death in custody of Samuel Carson, whether he has the authority to overrule the Director General's decision not to take disciplinary action against any Prison Service staff.

(AQW 17089/11-15)

Mr Ford: Matters of Discipline are dealt with by NICS Departments and Agencies as employers; as such there is no provision for Ministerial involvement in the process.

Prisoners: Identity Verification

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16110/11-15, what measures are taken to ensure that a prisoner entering custody has provided the correct personal details.

(AQW 17090/11-15)

Mr Ford: At the point of committal, the identity of the person being committed is confirmed by either a member of the Police Service of Northern Ireland or a member of Prisoner Escort Court Custody Services staff who has escorted them to prison. A member of staff working in the reception area of the relevant prison establishment will ask the person to confirm their name, date of birth, and that they are the person named on the committal warrant.

Previous records such as photographs, fingerprints and distinguishing marks can also be used to confirm the identity of those persons who have previously been in custody.

Legal Aid: Earnings Threshold

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the threshold of (i) earnings per annum; and (ii) savings or assets below which defence legal aid can be granted; and whether the earnings or assets of an applicant's partner are taken into consideration.

(AQW 17098/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no fixed financial threshold for criminal legal aid in respect of a defendant's means. It is a matter for the court to determine, in all the circumstances, whether a defendant has sufficient means to pay for his own defence. A defendant's means can include his own earnings and assets in addition to any funds which may be available to him from someone else. It is a matter for the court to determine whether or not such additional funds should be taken into account.

An application for legal aid to bring or defend a civil action can be granted through two of the civil legal aid schemes: Assistance by Way of Representation (ABWOR) and Civil Legal Aid. Annual earnings and capital thresholds are considered as outlined below.

ABWOR:

- The disposable lower income limit is £5,200 per annum.
- The disposable capital limit is £3,000.

Civil Legal Aid:

- The disposable lower income limit is £3,355 per annum.
- The disposable lower capital limit is £3,000.

Under both these levels the income and capital of any partner is taken into consideration unless they have a contrary interest, live apart or it is inequitable or impractical to aggregate their means.

Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008: Athletes

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice what consideration he has given to extending the Abuse of Trust provisions, in the Sexual Offences Order 2008, to sport as a means of protecting athletes over 16 years of age.

(AQW 17101/11-15)

Mr Ford: This matter was fully considered in 2010, following consultation by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure with the appropriate sports bodies in Northern Ireland.

I concluded then that the policy underpinning the creation of the abuse of trust offences was not designed to include positions outside the formal definition in the current legislation, and that to add sports coaches as a single group would be outside of the scope originally envisaged. I continue to hold that view.

Since then, I understand that, as a result of discussions DCAL held with SportNI and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, SportNI has introduced enhanced safeguarding training with an additional element which will help to protect athletes over 16 years of age.

Full-body Scanner: Magilligan Prison

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice whether there has been an interim report, update, or any other information supplied to his Department, regarding the full body pilot scanning scheme at Magilligan Prison, at any time prior to 22 November 2012.

(AQW 17105/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the member will be aware, two separate pilots of Millimetre Wave technology commenced in Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Prison and Young Offender Centre (YOC) on 26 September and 24 October respectively. Each pilot will run for three months.

Upon completion, both pilots will be evaluated to determine their effectiveness for use in a prison environment and I look forward to receiving a report by the end of January 2013. Due to the short duration of these pilots I have not commissioned an

interim report on either of the trials, although I have had brief verbal updates as part of regular discussions with senior Prison Service officials.

Legal Aid: Savings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what potential savings can his Department make on legal aid.
(AQW 17114/11-15)

Mr Ford: I am committed to bringing legal aid within budget, and have already brought forward significant reforms in criminal legal aid which will reduce annual expenditure in that area from £60m to under £37m by 2014/15.

Expenditure on civil legal aid has continued to rise and I estimate that further annual savings of around £20m will be required. I set out a range of reforms to achieve this in the Departmental Action Plan which I published earlier this year. The first of those reforms, which will deliver annual savings of £2.8 – 4.2m was considered by the Justice Committee on 22 November and was published for consultation on 29 November.

Departmental Savings

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what areas of potential savings his Department is considering.
(AQW 17115/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) has prepared savings delivery plans for the Budget 2011-15 period covering the financial years 2011-12 to 2014-15.

Throughout this period, the Department will regularly monitor progress against these plans and will publish six monthly updates.

The latest update is available on the DOJ website www.dojni.gov.uk via the following link:

<http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/publications/publication-categories/pubs-departmental-business/doj-savings-delivery-plan-update-as-at-31-march-2012.pdf>

Prisons: Attacks on Nurses

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16333/11-15, what action has been taken to ensure that there is no repeat of a situation where a panic alarm fails to activate; and how frequently panic alarms are tested.
(AQW 17139/11-15)

Mr Ford: A robust testing procedure is in place in each prison establishment to minimise the possibility of the failure of any alarm. All fixed point and personal alarms are tested daily and alarms on radio sets are tested once per week.

All faults are reported for immediate investigation and repair.

Prisons: CCTV

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the level of CCTV coverage in prisons, to protect vulnerable staff such as nurses.
(AQW 17140/11-15)

Mr Ford: CCTV is deployed in Prison Service establishments to enhance both the security of the prison and the safety of staff and prisoners.

As this question relates to current security measures in prisons, it would not be appropriate to provide specific details other than to confirm these matters are kept under constant review.

Part-time Reserve Gratuity Scheme

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice why the £392,000 surplus funds in the Part Time Reserve Gratuity Scheme are not being distributed among those with applications deemed out of time.
(AQW 17156/11-15)

Mr Ford: While I sympathise with those who have missed the deadline for various reasons, the Gratuity payment was an ex gratia payment. Due to the terms of the Scheme there had to be a deadline as the value of each payment was dependent on the number of verified applications. The onus had to be with the applicant to ensure their application was made within the deadline. Therefore I am unable to reopen the scheme to allow late applications.

This residue will be retained until the Department is confident that no further payments may be made. No decisions have yet been taken on how the residue can and should be used.

Fireworks: Licence Fee

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Justice if he has any plans to reduce the £30 licensing fee for the purchase of fireworks.
(AQW 17161/11-15)

Mr Ford: Obtaining a fireworks licence incurs a fee of £30 if there are less than 100 people attending the display; £80 if there are to be less than 1000 persons attending and £160 if there are to be more than 1000 people attending.

My officials have recently engaged in discussions with relevant statutory bodies on the arrangements for the small scale applications, and I expect to receive advice on their conclusions shortly.

Former Prison: Millisle

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has for the former prison facility at Millisle.
(AQW 17168/11-15)

Mr Ford: The site will continue in its present role as the Prison Service College until the Northern Ireland Community Service College at Desertcreat is completed. This is currently scheduled for 2015. Thereafter, the Millisle site will be advertised for sale on the open market.

Bangor Courthouse: Closure

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to explain the rationale behind the decision to close Bangor Courthouse, given that it processes 50 percent more cases than Strabane Courthouse which will remain open.
(AQW 17169/11-15)

Mr Ford: The rationale behind the decision to close Bangor Courthouse included a number of factors and was not based solely on business volumes. The efficiency savings, facilities for victims and witnesses, accessibility of the court office for all court users and investment required to bring Bangor Courthouse to an appropriate standard were key considerations.

Strabane Courthouse has facilities to hear a wider variety of court and tribunal hearings and offers universal access to the court office.

Limavady Courthouse: Closure

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice how many jobs are expected to be lost when Limavady Courthouse is closed in 2014.
(AQW 17198/11-15)

Mr Ford: The closure of Limavady Courthouse and the transfer of business to Coleraine Courthouse will not result in any job losses for the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Working Out Unit

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice how the proposed Working Out Unit on the Crumlin Road will operate.
(AQW 17199/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to my statement to the Assembly on 26 November, I can confirm that work is ongoing and Northern Ireland Prison (NIPS) officials are working closely with DOJ, Probation Board and other colleagues to develop proposals on how best to operate the proposed Working Out Unit on the Crumlin Road.

This will be a collaborative exercise which will take into consideration conclusions reached in a number of recent reports, including the CJINI review of transition to community arrangements for life sentence prisoners in Northern Ireland, the Prison Review Team report and the internal NIPS review of the working of the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

Working Out Unit

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Justice whether he will carry out a consultation with the local community in relation to the proposed Working Out Unit on the Crumlin Road, Belfast.
(AQW 17200/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to my statement to the Assembly on 26 November, I can confirm that NIPS officials, working closely with DOJ, Probation Board and other colleagues, are developing options on how best to redevelop the former Prisoner Assessment Unit as a Working Out Unit.

As part of that work, the exact client group will be determined, their needs identified and agreement reached on the services required to effectively meet those needs. Once the options for the development of a Working Out Unit are clear, consideration will then be given on how best to engage with the local community.

Prison Officers: Personal Protection Weapons

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Officers have applied for personal protection weapons because of dissident republican threats.
(AQW 17203/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question relates directly to the personal security of prison staff it would not be appropriate to place this information in the public domain.

Prison Officers: Bulletproof Windows

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many Prison Officers have applied for bullet proof windows because of dissident republican threats.

(AQW 17204/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this question relates to the personal security of prison staff, it would not be appropriate to place this information in the public domain.

Restorative Justice Schemes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many Restorative Justice Schemes are currently in operation.

(AQW 17207/11-15)

Mr Ford: In addition to the system of statutory Restorative Youth Conferencing, there are 15 community-based Restorative Justice Schemes accredited under the Government Protocol which are currently operational.

Prison Service: New Recruits

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice to outline the role of long serving Prison Officers in introducing new recruits to the Prison Service.

(AQW 17211/11-15)

Mr Ford: New recruits to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) are trained, monitored and assessed by skilled tutors based at the Prison Service College. These officers are long-serving and experienced members of NIPS.

Each new Custody Officer will experience working in residential units in order to build their operational knowledge and they will do so alongside experienced staff.

Prison Service: Custodial Facility for Women

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) what options are being considered for the development of a custodial facility for women; and (ii) when female prisoners will be relocated from Hydebank Wood to a new facility.

(AQW 17230/11-15)

Mr Ford: The development of a custodial facility for women will be subject to a full business case process involving the generation and consideration of a range of different options for its provision.

Across the Department of Justice work is currently being taken forward to speed up justice, address fine default and identify alternative community disposals where appropriate. DOJ officials are also engaged in refreshing the existing Women's Strategy to see what more needs to be done for women, particularly around prevention and diversion. This work, as well

as further research on the characteristics of the women offender population, will help to inform the development of an options appraisal paper on the sizing and configuration of any new facilities to be provided.

At this stage, it is not possible to forecast when female prisoners will be relocated from Hydebank Wood to a new facility.

Fuel Laundering

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of prosecutions and convictions for fuel laundering in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17310/11-15)

Mr Ford: HM Revenue & Customs have confirmed that for 2010/2011 there were four prosecutions and convictions and for 2011/2012 there were six prosecutions and convictions.

Access NI: Application Processing Time

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average length of time for the clearance of applications by Access NI in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17360/11-15)

Mr Ford: Access NI commenced operations on 1 April 2008. Its published service standards are to:

- Deliver 90% of basic and standard checks within 14 days; and
- Deliver 90% of enhanced checks within 28 days

from receipt of an application. Performance is published on the internet.

Unfortunately due to the limitations of AccessNI's management information system, I am unable to provide information on the average time taken to deliver a certificate for the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009. However, it is well documented that significant delays were experienced in dealing with applications between May and December 2008, after which the position improved significantly.

Information with regard to average times for delivery is available after 1 April 2009 and is detailed in the table below:

	1 Apr 09 - 31 Mar 10	1 Apr 10 – 31 Mar 11	1 Apr 11 - 31 Mar 12	1 Apr 12 - 30 Sept 12
Basic	7.2	5.3	5.9	6.1
Standard	7.2	5.8	5.8	5.9
Enhanced	15.3	13.3	20.9	21.6

AccessNI keep their timescales and procedures under review. For instance, from 26 November 2012, and in line with new legislation, AccessNI no longer sends enhanced applications to PSNI, or indeed other police forces, except where it is believed that information about the applicant may exist. This will have an impact on the average time taken to deal with such cases. Early results show that the timescale for some enhanced checks will reduce significantly.

Bangor Courthouse: Maintenance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what responsibility his Department has for the future maintenance of Bangor Courthouse after April 2013, given that it is a listed building.

(AQW 17395/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service is responsible for maintaining Bangor Courthouse in line with Department of Environment and Department of Finance and Personnel guidance to ensure it is kept secure and in reasonable condition until such times as it is no longer part of my Department's estate.

Prostitution

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what more his Department can do to tackle prostitution.

(AQW 17424/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department commissioned a research paper on prostitution, which was published in 2010, and hosted a stakeholder conference in 2011. From these initiatives a range of follow-up actions were identified and are being progressed by the Department and its partners in the PSNI and in the health, community and voluntary sectors. The Department is considering what further steps it can take to tackle prostitution, in consultation with stakeholders, as part of its current work to refresh its 'Women's Offending Behaviour in Northern Ireland' strategy.

Bangor Courthouse: Future Use

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice what consideration has been given to adapting Bangor Courthouse for community use after it ceases to operate as a court facility in April 2013.

(AQW 17482/11-15)

Mr Ford: Bangor Courthouse will be offered to other Departments to utilise and, if not required, may be placed on the open market. I would be happy to consider alternative uses for the community provided they are cost neutral for my Department.

Prison Service: Historical Items

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Justice what assistance his Department has provided to the Osbourne Group in the sourcing of historical Prison Service items from the old Armagh Prison.

(AQW 17484/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department has had no direct contact with the Osbourne Group with regard to historical items from the former Armagh Prison which are currently stored at the Prison Service College. However, NIPS officials have met with representatives from Armagh City Council and the Prince's Regeneration Trust to discuss the possibility of relevant artefacts being made available to the Council on loan, for the Armagh Prison regeneration project.

Department for Regional Development

Road Deaths: Prevention

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) how much has been spent by his Department on preventing road deaths in the last three years; and (ii) and how the annual figure is calculated.

(AQW 16778/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service is committed to providing safer roads for all road users through the continued investment in the established programmes of Local Transport and Safety Measures (LTSM) which include, various engineering measures, such as, collision remedial measures.

Details of funding for the LTSM programme in the last three financial years are provided in the table below:

Year	Funding For The LTSM Programme (£)
2009/10	22 million
2010/11	12.2 million
2011/12	22 million

In addition, I should advise that the Department of the Environment has responsibility for an advertising campaign which has been successful in raising driver awareness of key road safety messages, such as, speeding and drink/drugs. Such campaigns also make a significant contribution towards reducing the number of people killed and seriously injured on our roads.

Fuel Laundering: Environmental Damage

Mr Elliott asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQO 2804/11-15, how the figure of £700K to £750K is calculated.

(AQW 16905/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the estimated figure of £700k-£750k per month is based on an estimate of the increased inflationary cost. This is calculated using a construction cost of approximately £250m and a forecasted average inflation rate of 3.5%, which equates to £729k per month.

Flood Alleviation: Cushendall

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development why the Flood Alleviation Scheme for Cushendall has not commenced.

(AQW 16922/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, in conjunction with DARD's Rivers Agency and Northern Ireland Water, it is investigating the causes of recent flooding in Mill Street and Shore Street in Cushendall. As a result, measures are being drawn up to improve the resilience to flooding at these locations.

The first of these works, to be undertaken by Roads Service in the Shore Street/Layde Road area, has already been commissioned and is expected to commence soon.

Roads Service has also commenced negotiations with landowners in the Layde Road area to agree measures to prevent surface water flowing from private lands onto the public road.

Waste Water: Treatment Works, Ederney

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) what is the capacity of the Ederney Wastewater Treatment Works; (ii) how many dwellings and businesses it serves, as opposed to sewerage connections approvals which have yet to be implemented; and (iii) whether NI Water can service further development in light of the number of connections.

(AQW 16929/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) the Ederney Wastewater Treatment Works was designed for a population equivalent of 850. The assessment of 'population equivalent' is based on a formula which takes into account the number of industrial, agricultural, commercial and domestic users in the area served by a treatment works. (ii) The Works currently serves some 253 domestic properties, 26 businesses (ie non-domestic properties) and a school. While the Works is presently complying with its Water Order Consent, it is operating at capacity.

In relation to (iii) NIW is satisfied that in order to maintain compliance no further development in the area can be approved unless there is extant planning approval or the proposed discharge is on a like-for-like basis. The ultimate decision to approve or reject a planning application remains with Planning Service.

Cycling: Co-operation with DE

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister for Regional Development what work he is carrying out in conjunction with the Minister of Education to enhance cycling education in the curriculum and cycling provision in schools.

(AQW 16932/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Travelwise Team continues to liaise with schools to promote sustainable travel including cycling to places of education and employment through a programme of sustainable travel events.

My Department works closely with the Department of Education to host a programme of school visits, providing educational materials and organising supporting sustainable travel events such as the annual Bike week activities.

Car Parking: Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on providing extra car parking spaces in Donaghadee. (AQW 16952/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I understand that since my meeting with the Member, along with representatives of the Donaghadee Commerce and Development Group (DCDG), in September 2011, Roads Service officials have been liaising with Mr John Caldwell of DCDG to assess the viability of town centre sites in Donaghadee for potential conversion to car parks. However, as I stressed during our meeting, even if a suitable site can be found, there is no guarantee of funding to carry out the necessary works.

Of the eight sites considered by officials, the most promising in terms of size, cost of conversion and access was the Methodist Church Car Park. The current access from Church Lane is good, although Church Lane itself has limitations. Unfortunately, I have been advised that representatives of the church would not be willing to enter into a long term lease agreement at this time.

Car Parking: Holywood

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to create resident only car parking on Spencer Street, Holywood. (AQW 16953/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it is working towards the introduction of Residents' Parking Schemes within all areas of parking restraint identified in the Belfast Metropolitan Transport Plan 2015 (BMTP).

Officials have further advised that, while Holywood is not specifically identified within the BMTP in this respect, a number of requests have been received for the provision of residents' parking within residential areas of the town centre, including Spencer Street. Accordingly, Roads Service has added these locations to its list of areas for future consideration, once all the areas identified within the BMTP have been addressed.

Aggregates Levy: Avoidance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development what measures are in place to prevent contractors and sub-contractors illegally avoiding the payment of aggregates tax on any work carried out under the auspices of his Department. (AQW 16963/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the aggregate levy is an environmental tax on the commercial exploitation of aggregate in the UK. As such, the supplier of the aggregate must register and complete quarterly returns to HM Revenue & Customs who, in turn, monitor potential avoidance and evasion of the levy.

Officials have further advised that they incorporate a signed declaration in contracts, to ensure the main contractor is fully aware of the requirement for the aggregate levy to be paid on aggregates sourced in connection with such contracts. Compliance checks are subsequently completed during the operation of these contracts.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people have used the Door-2-Door service in each of the last five years. (AQW 16974/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the statistical information available. Please note that the information regarding the number of users for Moneymore Coaches (in Administration), previously Chambers Coach hire, is only available from December 2007. Similarly information from Disability Action is only available from April 2009. In both cases booking systems in place previously did not record the information.

NUMBER OF DOOR-TO-DOOR USERS

	Moneymore	Disability Action	Bridge	Total
2007/08	991	-	-	991
2008/09	1,480	-	153	1,633
2009/10	1,885	529	203	2,617
2010/11	1,844	623	180	2,647
2011/12	1,612	538	170	2,320

Note:- D2D Services in Londonderry and Belfast commenced September 2008

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the potential savings for the Door-2-Door service by removing the following categories of qualifying clients (i) referral by GP letter; (ii) people in receipt of high rate care Disability Living Allowance; and (iii) people who were members of Bridge Accessible Transport or Disability Action in 2006.

(AQW 17005/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: It is not possible to estimate any potential savings by removing these categories of membership. The Door-to-Door service providers are contracted to provide services to all members across all eligibility bands at a broadly fixed sum. If the eligibility criteria was changed, then this could result in services being more widely available for members who meet the remaining criteria.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many people availed of the Door-2-Door service in each of the last five years who qualified (i) through referral by a GP letter; (ii) by being in receipt of high rate care Disability Living Allowance; and (iii) as members of Bridge Accessible Transport or Disability Action in 2006.

(AQW 17006/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The table below details the statistical information available. Please note that the information regarding the number of users for Moneymore Coaches (in Administration), previously Chambers Coach Hire is only available from December 2007. Similarly information from Disability Action is only available from April 2009.

(i) GP eligibility

	Moneymore	Disability action	Bridge	Total
2007/08	124	-	-	124
2008/09	327	-	25	352
2009/10	389	189	46	624
2010/11	412	196	49	657
2011/12	371	171	44	586

(ii) DLA Care eligibility

	Moneymore	Disability Action	Bridge	Total
2007/08	57	-	-	57
2008/09	96	-	6	102
2009/10	97	17	10	124
2010/11	123	27	18	168
2011/12	125	22	21	168

(iii) Disability Action members

	Total
2007/08	0
2008/09	0
2009/10	91
2010/11	82
2011/12	66

(iii) Bridge Accessible Transport members

	Total
2007/08	0
2008/09	58
2009/10	64
2010/11	30

	Total
2011/12	13

*D2D Services in Londonderry and Belfast commenced September 2008

Footpaths: Replacement/Improvement, North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any footpath improvement or replacement schemes planned for the North Down area in 2013/14.

(AQW 17008/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that the detailed budget for the 2013/14 financial year has not yet been finalised. Therefore, it is not possible to provide details of future works programmes at this time.

Footpaths: Tughan Court, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans there are to carry out work on the pavements at Tughan Court, Bangor.

(AQW 17037/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the flagged footways in this area are considered to be in a safe and serviceable condition. While it currently has no plans to undertake improvement works on the footway network within Tughan Court, Bangor, officials have indicated that Tughan Court could potentially be included in the 3-year rolling footway programme in 2014/15, subject to available funding and other competing schemes.

Roads Service will continue to inspect the footways on a cyclical basis and any defects identified will be programmed for repair in accordance with current maintenance policies and procedures.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is made for the application of local knowledge when booking arrangements for the Door-2-Door service.

(AQW 17049/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Booking staff from all three Door-to-Door service providers have built up local knowledge in regard to addresses, member requirements and usual destinations. They apply this knowledge to assist members and driving staff and where possible to enable sharing of buses, although this can be complex at times given the nature of the service and the specific needs of each member.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Door-2-Door service vehicles are available in the North Down area on a Sunday; and how this compares with the rest of the week.

(AQW 17050/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Currently there are three vehicles which operate in the North Down area on a Sunday. Usage figures suggest that the demand from members on a Sunday is being met. The service provider has provided assurances that it regularly reviews statistical data to ensure that this is the case.

The greatest demand for services is between Monday and Friday and the operator has six to seven vehicles available depending on demand.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been spent on advertising the Door-2-Door service in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17051/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:-

2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£54,170.41	£147,570.61	£2,545.90	£381.00	£1,259.00

You will note from the information provided that substantial monies were spent on advertising the Door-to-Door scheme when it was first introduced on a roll-out basis between 2007/2008 and 2008/2009. This resulted in a significant number of people wanting to join the scheme which has led to a membership figure in excess of 13,000. However, overall the number of members who use the scheme when compared to the number of actual members is low.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what checks his Department carries out to ensure that the Door-2-Door service has the correct number and range of vehicles to meet the needs of its users.

(AQW 17053/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The number and range of vehicles used by the service providers equate to the number and range submitted in the tender submissions upon which contracts are agreed. Service providers have been provided with information on the number of people with limiting long term illness, health problem or disability illness by operating areas.

All vehicles used by all the service providers are accessible vehicles. The providers of service have operational responsibility to ensure, as far as possible and in line with contract terms, that the vehicles are allocated to meet the demand and needs of users within available resources. There are occasions when, due to high demand, requests for transport from members at a certain time or for a particular type of vehicle may not be able to be met. In these circumstances all service providers try to accommodate members by offering transport at other times when vehicles are available.

Departmental officials monitor complaints from users and have conducted telephone surveys of members. This did not suggest a major problem with deployment of vehicles. The current consultation exercise currently on-going in regard to Door to Door services, although not specifically about vehicle usage or deployment, is due to close in January.

Car Parking Offences: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many fixed penalty notices for car parking offences have been issued in North Down in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17060/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that details of Penalty Charge Notices issued in North Down for parking contraventions, in each of the last three years, along with the most up to date figures available for the current financial year, are shown in the table below:

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	April – September 2012
Bangor	3672	3156	3411	1994
Hollywood	1201	1865	1657	574
Total	4873	5021	5068	2568

Traffic Wardens: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many traffic wardens operate in the North Down area.

(AQW 17061/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that in the North Down area, there are four Traffic Attendants based in Bangor and one Traffic Attendant based in Hollywood.

Traffic Attendants can be deployed at other locations in the North Down area, as required.

Water Pipes: Repair Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what has been the cost of repairing broken water pipes in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17063/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the expenditure over the past three financial years on repairing broken, leaking or burst water pipes which are part of the public water infrastructure is as follows:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£6.8 million	£6.4 million	£6.3 million

Footway Resurfacing: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what extra resources are available for footway resurfacing schemes in the North Down area.

(AQW 17064/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I am pleased to advise the Member that I have been able to release additional capital funding for carriageway and footway resurfacing schemes within the North Down area.

My officials are developing scheme programmes to the value of £700,000 that will include footway resurfacing schemes in Hollywood and Groomsport.

Door-2-Door Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is available for wheelchair users under the Door-2-Door scheme.

(AQW 17084/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: All vehicles used by the three service providers are wheelchair accessible. In addition all drivers have received MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme). This is a nationally recognised standard for minibus training which comprises on-road driving assessment, classroom based theory training and also additional training for drivers who will be transporting passengers with disabilities. This training also covers issues such as tail-lift operation and proper securing of wheelchairs using wheelchair restraint systems.

yLink Card Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what has been the cost to date of the yLink card scheme for 16-23 year olds.

(AQW 17108/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The issue of discounted promotions is an operational matter for Translink. However they have advised that capital costs which covered the provision of the relevant hardware and set up costs were £50,325.

Bus and Rail Fares: Schoolchildren

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans the Department has to provide additional concessionary bus and rail fares for school children aged between 16 and 18 years.

(AQW 17110/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Currently, only young people between the ages of 16 and 18 years, who have certain disabilities, may qualify for concessions for bus and rail travel under the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fare Scheme.

Normally, the Department of Education provides free travel for post primary school children who live more than 3 miles from their school. Also, a child with a statement of special educational needs, that includes transport requirements, may be eligible for transport assistance irrespective of how far they live from school.

School children aged 16 and over, who are not eligible for assistance under the above arrangements, can get discounts of at least one third on public transport fares by using Translink's y-link smartcard. This card offers substantial savings across all Translink services and is available to those aged between 16-23 years.

Given the current pressures on my budget, I am not in a position to provide additional concessionary fares for school children aged between 16 and 18 years. The current budget for the Concessionary Fares Scheme is around £30 million per annum.

yLink Card Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development why the yLink card scheme does not extend to return travel day passes or season tickets.

(AQW 17111/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The yLink card is a commercial product introduced by Translink to allow students and those under 24 to have access to the 'lowest fare' when buying a single, 'for cash' ticket. Translink advise that the development/design of this product followed research which identified that the majority of students will not make the (financial) commitment to purchase more than a single journey; therefore the product is tailored to the demands of the market. Other multi-journey tickets already offer discounts which are available to passengers in this age group.

Bus Shelters

Ms McCorley asked the Minister for Regional Development what criteria is used to determine the location of bus shelters; and when the current contract with Adshel ends.

(AQW 17112/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that, assuming the location is suitable in terms of footway width, sight lines etc, Translink is consulted in relation to existing and likely passenger usage at the particular stop and whether it is considered to be an appropriate location. All new bus shelters are subject to the normal planning application process.

Officials further advise that the current contract for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters in Northern Ireland, between my Department and Adshel, expires in 2015.

Gritting

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what more his Department can do to ensure that grit boxes are fully stocked on a regular basis in the North Down area to cope with a potential heavy snowfall this year.

(AQW 17116/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that all salt bins within the North Down area have been restocked in advance of the winter season. Regular checks will be carried out throughout the winter period to ensure that further restocking takes place in a timely matter, subject to the availability of staff resources at the time.

I am further advised that Roads Service has no proposals to change the current operational arrangements which have worked effectively in the past in the North Down area.

Savings

Mr Easton asked Minister for Regional Development what areas of potential savings his Department is considering.
(AQW 17117/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has been working to generate savings of £159.1 million across the Budget period (2011-12 to 2014-15) through our Savings Delivery Plan, and has delivered savings of £15.46 million in the first year. The Savings Delivery Plan consists of a range of measures, which are detailed on my Department's website, the link to which is provided below.

DRD Savings Delivery Plan -<http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=7051>

This Savings Delivery Plan is currently being updated to reflect the Executive's 7 November 2012 decision, as part of its Jobs and Economy Initiative, not to increase car parking tariffs over the remainder of the Budget period. The Executive in making its decision agreed to fund the budgetary impact of this loss of income to my Department, thereby reducing the level of savings required across the Budget period from £159.1 million to £146 million.

yLink Card Scheme

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he has to extend the scope of the yLink card to (i) return journeys; (ii) day passes; and (iii) season tickets.
(AQW 17145/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The issue of discounted promotions is an operational matter for Translink. They have advised me that they have no plans to extend yLink to give additional discount on further ticket/fare types. The product was introduced to allow students and those under 24 to have access to the 'lowest fare' when buying a single, 'for cash' ticket.

Translink have also advised that the development/design of this product follows research which identified that the majority of students will not make the financial commitment to purchase more than single journeys, therefore the product is tailored to the demands of the market.

Gritting and Salting

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development where his Department obtains the salt and grit used on the roads during the winter months.
(AQW 17153/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department purchases supplies of salt from Irish Salt Mining & Exploration Co. Ltd. of 10 Fort Road, Kilroot, Carrickfergus, Co. Antrim.

Grit supplies are purchased under local contracts from various quarries across Northern Ireland.

Lennon v Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, following the conclusion of the Fair Employment Tribunal proceedings in Lennon-v-DRD, whether his Department will now apologise to Alan Lennon for the discrimination against him by the former Minister.
(AQW 17157/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Fair Employment Tribunal upheld Dr Lennon's allegation of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of religious belief and dismissed his complaint of unlawful discrimination on the ground of political opinion. The Department has now agreed terms in full and final settlement of the case. As there was no allegation made by Dr Lennon against any official within the Department I consider the matter concluded.

Lennon v Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the anticipated cost of defending the Lennon-v-DRD Fair Employment Tribunal cost.
(AQW 17158/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department is not yet in a position to provide the full costs of defending the Tribunal case. I can however confirm that the actual legal fees for the Tribunal Case to the end of the last financial year, 2011/12, amounted to around £85,000.

Compensation and Legal Fees

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how much has been paid by his Department in each of the last three years and in the current year to date in (i) compensation and (ii) legal fees.

(AQW 17159/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of the amount of (i) compensation and (ii) legal fees paid by my Department, in the last three financial years and to date in the current financial year, are shown in the table below:

Fiscal Year	Compensation (£000's)	Legal Fees Paid (£000's)
2009/10	1,983	2,039
2010/11	2,347	1,982
2011/12	2,133	2,384
2012/13 *	1,338	1,467
Totals	7,801	7,872

* Unaudited figures – subject to change.

Double-yellow Lines

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 16415/11-15, whether the absence of the end marking affects the enforceability of any associated legal status.

(AQW 17176/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that the absence of end markings does not undermine the prohibition on waiting as indicated by yellow lines.

Traffic Penalty Tribunal

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to question 16415/11-15, who is responsible for giving legal advice to the adjudicators in the Northern Ireland Traffic Penalty Tribunal.

(AQW 17177/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that Adjudicators at the Traffic Penalty Tribunal are legally qualified persons, who are appointed by the Lord Chancellor or by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, acting jointly.

Should you have any further queries about proceedings and provisions relating to Adjudicators, these should be addressed to the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service.

Lennon v Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what investigation has been conducted, and with what result, into the former Minister, Conor Murphy, having access to privileged legal advice to the Department arising from the finding in the Lennon-v-DRD Fair Employment Tribunal.

(AQW 17209/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department did not provide the former Minister Conor Murphy with any legal advice arising from the finding in the Fair Employment Tribunal.

Taxis: Parking Spaces, Derry City

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 16623/11-15, what plans he has to increase the number, given that over 1,000 taxis operate in the constituency.

(AQW 17227/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service, along with key stakeholders, including taxi representatives, has been involved in developing Transport Plans for the City of Culture 2013. As part of these plans, temporary facilities for all modes of public transport for specific large events are being considered.

Currently, taxi ranks are installed in areas where there is greatest demand from pedestrians requiring the services of a public hire taxis. Therefore, in order to maintain their efficiency, taxi ranks should not be used as parking facilities.

In the past, Roads Service has worked in consultation with City Centre Initiative and taxi representatives to identify areas throughout the City where taxi ranks are in greatest demand. Roads Service has also been involved in discussions with the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) and taxi representatives, regarding proposed changes to legislation in relation to taxi licensing. Roads Service has agreed to review taxi rank provision, in conjunction with the implementation of the proposed new legislation.

Penalty Charge Notices

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development how many Penalty Charge Notices have been issued as result of vehicles being parked illegally at the Electrical Vehicle Charging Point in the Monaghan Street Car Park, Newry, since the provision of the facility.

(AQW 17231/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Officials from my Department's Roads Service have advised that, as of 23 November 2012, two Penalty Charge Notices have been issued to illegally parked vehicles at the designated spaces for electric vehicle charging in this car park.

Sewer Flooding Incidents

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the criteria used to assess whether people can have their properties added to the DG5 register of sewer flooding incidents.

(AQW 17235/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that its DG5 process for registering properties at risk of internal flooding from sewers is similar to that used by the water companies in England/Wales, and is governed by rules which are audited on an annual basis. The DG5 process commences automatically after an incident of internal flooding has been reported to NIW and does not require any action by property owners. DG5 investigations are also initiated as part of NIW's Drainage Area Plan process.

In order for a property to be placed on the DG5 internal flooding register, the following criteria apply:

- The property is deemed to have been affected by an internal flooding incident when foul, combined or surface water escaped from the public sewerage system onto the property and entered a building or passed below a suspended floor;
- The property is normally occupied and used for residential, public, commercial, business or industrial purposes. Buildings whose prime purpose is storage or installation of domestic appliances are excluded;
- The internal flooding was due to hydraulic incapacity in the sewer;
- The internal flooding incident is investigated robustly and inclusion on the register is approved by a NIW panel of experts.
- Properties where, during a minor rainfall event, internal flooding was prevented from overloaded sewers only by a temporary measure (e.g. non-return valve in the sewer) may qualify for inclusion on the DG5 register.
- Flooding arising from severe weather events (greater than 1 in 20 year event) is excluded.

NI Water: Capital Projects, North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what progress has been made on NI Water's capital projects in the North Down area.

(AQW 17288/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that the planned expenditure within its Capital Works Programme for the North Down constituency area is as detailed in the table below.

Period	Expenditure (£000s)
PC10 year 3 (2012/13)	£6,741
PC13 year 1 (2013/14)	£6,671
PC13 year 2 (2014/15)	£7,830
Total	£21,242

This will include expenditure on projects such as improvements to the Holywood sewer catchment area (including Kinnegar Lagoons), the Bangor area sewerage network, the Millisle Drainage Area Plan, capital maintenance upgrades to eight pumping stations and North Down watermain improvements.

Sewage Treatment: Kinnegar, Holywood

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the proposed upgrade to the sewage treatment works at Kinnegar, Holywood.

(AQW 17298/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that the £3.5 million project to resolve the sewage pollution at Kinnegar Lagoons, Holywood is on target to be delivered within its PC13 Business Plan which covers the period April 2013 to March 2015. Subject to the usual statutory approvals and budgetary constraints, NIW may be able to commence the project early within the next financial year with a construction period of approximately twelve months.

While this project will prevent further pollution to the Lagoons, a second phase will consider the remediation options for the Lagoons and particularly the odours emanating from the mud at low-tide. NIW has commenced work on this second phase

and it is progressing well with several environmental studies and mud samplings completed this year. Further water sampling and flood analysis is also planned and the emerging findings will be known in the Spring of 2013 along with any financial and timing implications which will be largely dependent on the recommended remediation option.

Bus Lanes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the success of the new bus lanes in Belfast. (AQW 17375/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Prior to the start of the implementation of the Belfast on the Move Sustainable Transport Enabling Measures traffic flow surveys were carried out on the arterial routes into and through the city centre. Following the completion of these works, which is scheduled for mid 2013, further surveys will be carried out to measure the success of the project.

In the meantime we have gathered some preliminary data which indicates that:

- traffic levels are lower across the city centre and that some of the 'through' traffic has diverted to more strategic routes;
- there now appears to have been no significant impact on journey times through the city centre; and
- there was no decline in the numbers of cars parking in the city centre. This would indicate that people are still driving into the city to park and there is no evidence to suggest that the changes have deterred car borne shoppers.

My Department is also liaising with Translink in relation to the impact the project to date has had on bus services within the city. Early indications from Translink are that buses are getting through the city centre more quickly, the services are staying on schedule and are more reliable and their customers are seeing real benefits. In addition the Park & Ride facilities serving Belfast have seen a marked increase in usage.

In view of the initial indications above it would appear that the project has to date been successful. Once the works are completed and the further surveys are carried out we will be able to measure the full impacts of the project.

Transport Policy: Public Health

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is taken to ensure that public health is considered when transport policy is being decided. (AQW 17444/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department liaises closely with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) who have lead responsibility for public health matters. Officials from both departments are currently engaged on policies that cut across transport and public health responsibilities. These include the Active Travel Strategy, the Obesity Prevention Framework, Autism Strategy and the Action Plan for implementing the recommendations from the Bamford review for improving all public services for people with mental health or learning disabilities.

The Department's transport policies are also an integral part of the Draft Strategic Framework for Public Health, "Fit And Well - Changing Lives 2012-2022" on which consultation by DHSSPS recently closed.

When developing the new approach to Regional Transportation Strategy, my Department, in accordance with guidance from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, undertook an assessment on health as part of the development of an Integrated Impact Assessment.

Department for Social Development

Welfare Reform: Software Systems

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Social Development, in the event of a delay in the delivery of the software for Welfare Reform, will benefits be paid at the old rate; and whether any shortfall will be taken out of the block grant. (AQW 16672/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): Two new software systems will be introduced as a result of Welfare Reform – one for Universal Credit and one for Personal Independence Payment. Both systems are being developed by Department of Work and Pensions and are on target to be delivered in time for implementation. Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit cannot be introduced until after the Welfare Reform Bill has received Royal Assent.

The implementation of Universal Credit in Great Britain commences in April 2013 with early pathfinder activity in the greater Manchester area followed by a phased national roll-out commencing from October 2013. The date for introducing Universal Credit in Northern Ireland has been changed to April 2014. The 6 month delay in introducing Universal Credit in Northern Ireland is to allow the system to be adapted to accommodate the changes announced on 22 October (split payments, housing cost payments direct to landlords and more frequent payments). This timescale is challenging but realistic for making the required changes but as always there will be contingency arrangements in the event that the system has not been fully adapted.

When Personal Independence Payments and Universal Credit are introduced in Northern Ireland they will be paid at the rates set for these benefits.

Under the current funding structure spending on social security benefits for Northern Ireland is classified as Annually Managed Expenditure (AME), funded from HM Treasury in line with actual need, outside of the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) funding allocated to and managed by the NI Executive. The costs of administering the social security system such as the cost of information technology and staff are funded from the NI Executive managed Departmental Expenditure Limit.

Where the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012 has been enacted and there is a delay in the delivery of associated software, contingency arrangements will be put in place. These are likely to be clerical workarounds and it is expected that the additional costs will have to be met from NI Executive managed Departmental Expenditure Limit. Provided that Northern Ireland is maintaining parity of benefit rates, it is not expected that there would be any adjustment to the NI Departmental Expenditure Limit under the current funding arrangements for the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

If however the Welfare Reform Bill is not enacted or is delayed and the Northern Ireland Executive decide to pay benefits on a different basis or rate to those in the rest of the United Kingdom, the Statement of Funding Policy, allows UK Ministers to consider the level of any adjustment to the NI Executive managed Departmental Expenditure Limit. In this situation the costs of administering different social security systems and using complex IT systems which the Department for Work and Pensions have moved on from will also have to be met from the NI Executive managed Departmental Expenditure Limit.

Charity Commission

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development (i) what is the salary band for members of the Charity Commission; (ii) for how long it has been operating; (iii) the total cost of running the Commission during this time; and (iv) to outline the function of the body.

(AQW 16913/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Board of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) comprises a Chief Commissioner, Deputy Chief Commissioner and five Commissioners. Remuneration is £5,000 per annum for the Chief Commissioner, £3,000 per annum for the Deputy Chief Commissioner and £2,000 per annum for each of the five Commissioners.

The Commission was established as a non departmental public body under the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008 on 27 March 2009 to provide a system of regulation and registration of charities operating in Northern Ireland. The total cost of running the Commission from 27 March 2009 to 31 March 2012 is £1,986,748.

The general functions of the Commission are set out in the Charities Act and are namely:

- 1 Determining whether institutions are or are not charities.
- 2 Encouraging and facilitating the better administration of charities.
- 3 Identifying and investigating apparent misconduct or mismanagement in the administration of charities and taking remedial or protective action in connection with misconduct or mismanagement therein.
- 4 Determining whether public collection certificates should be issued, and remain in force, in respect of public charitable collections.
- 5 Obtaining, evaluating and disseminating information in connection with the performance of any of the Commission's functions or meeting any of its objectives.
- 6 Giving information or advice, or making proposals, to the Department on matters relating to any of the Commission's functions or meeting any of its objectives.

Single Room Rate: Newry and Armagh

Ms Fearon asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in Newry and Armagh will be affected by the introduction of the single room rate.

(AQW 16938/11-15)

Mr McCausland: On 1 January 2012 changes were introduced which increased the age criteria from 25 years to 34 years for single people who were limited to a single room rate (Shared Accommodation Rate) of the Local Housing Allowance. Claimants aged 25-34 in receipt of Housing Benefit before 1 January 2012 were protected from the changes until their next anniversary of their claim. Protection ends for all cases on the 31 December 2012.

The number of people affected in Newry and Armagh is detailed in the table below: -

Council area	Claimants under 35yrs on SAR* at 31/10/12	Claimants aged 25-34 on SAR* at 31/10/12	Anticipated number of claimants (25-34) still to be affected by SAR* changes
Newry	529	338	43
Armagh	204	129	13

* Shared Accommodation Rate

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Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to Employment and Support Allowance to detail the number of people who, between June 2011 and October 2012, have (i) been through the work capability assessment process; (ii) been refused entitlement; (iii) lodged an appeal; (iv) had their appeal heard; and (v) had their initial refusal overturned.

(AQW 16960/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Between June 2011 and October 2012:

- i) 84,024 claimants have participated in the Work Capability Assessment process.
- ii) 33,166 claimants have been refused entitlement following participation in the Work Capability Assessment process.
- iii) The Department has received a total of 21,872 Employment and Support Allowance appeals against decisions made by Departmental decision makers.
- iv) 10,219 claimants have received the outcome of their appeal following a determination made by an Appeal Tribunal.
- v) In 3,543 cases, the appeal was upheld in the claimants favour.

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Welfare Advice: South Down

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the level of funding that welfare advice organisations in South Down currently receive from his Department; and (ii) whether he will consider releasing additional funding to the voluntary and community sector so that it may adequately deal with the impact of Welfare Reform.

(AQW 16995/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department funds voluntary generalist advice services through the Community Support Programme, which allocates funding to councils, who in turn contribute additional resources and commission advice services locally based on the needs of their areas. Advice organisations provide information and advice on a wide range of subjects including welfare and benefits, health, education, employment, housing, debt, consumer and legal issues. South Down covers three council areas - Down District Council, Newry and Mourne District Council and Banbridge District Council. My Department's advice funding to these areas is approximately £170,000 per annum. My Department also provides funding to Regional Advice Support organisations, who support frontline advice providers in delivering services.

The Social Security Agency is currently considering what further support customers require in relation to Welfare Reform. Officials have already begun to engage with representatives from the Voluntary and Community Sector to discuss the role they can play in implementing Welfare Reform in Northern Ireland.

Co-Ownership Scheme

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the current annual budget for the Co-Ownership Scheme; and how this compares with the same period over each of the last five years.

(AQW 17078/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The annual level of funding provided by my Department to the Co-Ownership Scheme for the current financial, and each of the preceding 5 years, is as follows:

2012/13	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008-09	2007-08
£33 million	£28.25 million	£18 million	£15 million	£15 million	£18.8 million

ReStore Programme: Pilot Projects

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development to list the pilot projects that have been rolled-out under the ReStore programme; and how much funding each project has received under this programme.

(AQW 17086/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Seven pilot ReStore projects have been rolled out across Northern Ireland, with funding allocations for each as follows: -

- 1 Belfast, Castle Street - £165k
- 2 Belfast, North Street/Smithfield - £130.5k
- 3 Belfast, Glen Road - £150k
- 4 Larne, Main Street – £150k

- 5 Lurgan, William Street, High Street, Market Street - £150k
- 6 Londonderry, Bank Place/Union Hall Place - £158k
- 7 Londonderry, Spencer Road - £108k

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ReStore Programme: Further Projects

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Social Development whether he intends to provide funding to support projects similar to the ReStore programme.

(AQW 17087/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An evaluation of the seven ReStore pilots completed to date is currently being finalised. My decision on mainstreaming the ReStore initiative will be made in the context of that evaluation and other budgetary pressures and priorities in my Department.

Social Security Agency: Requests for Bank Details

Lord Morrow asked Minister for Social Development, in light of the advice that people should not give out their bank details over the phone, can benefits staff to make phonecalls to ask customers, from whom they are seeking to recoup overpayments, for their bank details.

(AQW 17088/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The recovery of benefit overpayments is administered by the Debt Centre NI in the Social Security Agency. It is not the policy of the Debt Centre to phone customers to request bank details for the recovery of overpayments. Where a recoverable overpayment occurs and a customer is on benefits, recovery is made through deductions from their benefit. Where a recoverable overpayment occurs to a customer who is no longer in receipt of benefits the following methods of payment are made available:

- Cash,
- Cheque;
- Postal Order;
- Bank Standing Order;
- Debit Card.

None of these methods require the transfer of bank details (e.g. bank account number and sort code) over the phone.

In the case of Bank Standing Orders, the customer is issued with a standing order template to complete and present to their bank. The bank establishes the standing order and provides the Debt Centre with a copy of the completed template.

In the case of payment by debit card the Debt Centre does not require the customer's bank account details. To progress the transaction the customer is asked to provide the following information: name, national insurance number, value of payment, debit card type, debit card number, from and to card dates, issue no (if applicable), and the three digit security code. No other banking information is required.

Homeowner Grants/Schemes

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what grants or schemes are available for home owners to improve or extend their properties.

(AQW 17109/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The following grants are available through the Housing Executive's Home Improvement Grants Scheme to help home owners improve their properties:-

- Disabled Facilities Grants - to make the home of a person with a disability suitable for his/her needs;
- Repairs Grants - to assist landlords with the cost of compliance with a Notice of Unfitness;
- Renovation Grants - only available in exceptional circumstances to improve houses where there is imminent and significant risk to the health and safety of the occupants;
- Home Repair Assistance Grants - also only available in exceptional circumstances to facilitate moderate repairs and improvements to the external fabric of the home;
- Group Repair Schemes - to improve the facades of terraces of houses;
- Warm Homes Scheme - to provide loft and cavity wall insulation and to provide new heating where none exists or to replace Economy 7 heating with oil or gas;
- Boiler Replacement Scheme - to replace old, inefficient boilers that are more than 15 years old in owner occupied houses.

Personal Independence Payments

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 15626/11-15, whether the formal award will include a clause to ensure that home visits are carried out when required.

(AQW 17120/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The contract for the Personal Independent Payment assessment service in Northern Ireland has been awarded to Capita Business Services Limited.

The Personal Independent Payment medical assessment requirements describe the circumstances that health professionals will consider to ensure that assessments are carried out in an appropriate manner. This is informed by each customer's personal circumstances and includes determining whether the medical assessment will be in a claimant's home.

Universal Credit: Free Independent Advice

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to ensure that people will be able to access free independent advice in advance of the expected implementation of universal credit.

(AQW 17130/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department funds voluntary generalist advice services through the Community Support Programme, which allocates funding to councils, who in turn contribute additional resources and commission advice services locally based on the needs of their areas. Advice organisations provide information and advice on a wide range of subjects including welfare and benefits, health, education, employment, housing, debt, consumer and legal issues. My Department stands by its commitment to protect the most vulnerable and provide support for those who need it.

DSD frontline advice support is approximately £1.6 million per annum throughout Northern Ireland with £1.9 million allocated in 2012/13 by local councils. Funding is also provided to the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium who support frontline advice providers in delivering services. My officials are engaging with the Consortium to discuss how the Advice Sector can best support our customers through the implementation of Universal Credit in Northern Ireland.

Social and Affordable Homes: Banbridge

Mrs Dobson asked Minister for Social Development, in relation to his target of building 1,825 new social and affordable homes, how many are planned for the Banbridge District; and what impact these houses will have on meeting demand.

(AQW 17149/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The 2012/13 Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) does not currently include any schemes for Banbridge District Council area.

Clanmil Housing Association has a proposal at Dromore Street, Banbridge for 18 Elderly units. Although this scheme was originally programmed to be delivered during 2012/13, the housing association has recently advised that, due to slippage, the scheme is unlikely to start until 2013/14.

The 2012 Housing Need Assessment shows a requirement for 126 units in Banbridge District over the period 2012-2017. The greatest concentrations of need are in Banbridge Town (100 units), Dromore (15 units), Kinallen (6 units) and Loughbrickland (5 units).

The Housing Executive is currently in the process of formulating a draft 3 year Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2013/14 – 2015/16. It is anticipated that this programme will include a number of new social units for the Banbridge district.

Affordable homes are currently delivered through the co-ownership scheme with the areas in which properties are purchased being determined by the demands of applicants to the scheme.

Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether the change in specification of window hinges to be used in the Housing Executive double glazing programme has been referred to, or approved by, the Central Procurement Directorate.

(AQW 17150/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Central Procurement Directorate has no part to play in the approval process for changing, amending or creating new specifications for materials, components etc for Housing Executive properties. This is a matter reserved for either the Housing Executive Chief Executive's Business Committee or the Housing Executive Board.

The Housing Executive is designated as a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE).

Glass and Glazing Federation

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many times he has met with the Glass and Glazing Federation regarding the Housing Executive double glazing programme.

(AQW 17151/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I met with representatives of the Glass and Glazing Federation twice. I have also met with other representatives of the glazing industry but I am not aware if they were members of the Glass and Glazing Federation.

Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development how many redecoration grants have been paid in each year since the introduction of the new Housing Executive double glazing scheme, broken down by region.

(AQW 17172/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of redecoration allowances paid as part of the Housing Executive's double glazing window replacement schemes since 12 March 2012 are as follows:-

North Region	South Region	Belfast Region	Total
242	697	417	1356

These payment figures are inclusive of schemes that have commenced on site prior to 12 March 2012, or where the Housing Executive's contractual obligations predated 12 March 2012.

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Staff Suspensions

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development how many staff in his Department are currently (i) suspended due to internal investigations; and (ii) continuing to work while facing an internal investigation.

(AQW 17174/11-15)

Mr McCausland: One member of staff in the Department for Social Development is currently suspended due to an internal investigation. Twenty staff are continuing to work while facing an internal investigation.

Housing Benefit Tribunals: Vulnerable People

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16697/11-15, for his assessment of the impact on vulnerable claimants, such as those with a mental illness, of housing benefit tribunals within a court setting; and whether his Department allows claimants to request a different location.

(AQW 17221/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) has administrative responsibility (under a Service Level Agreement with the Department) for the efficient management and delivery of appeal tribunals, including the provision of appropriate venues. The increased use of court buildings by the Appeals Service is subject to ongoing assessment with officials from both NICTS and DSD engaging directly with appellants, representatives and panel members on site to seek feedback on the experience of tribunal users coming to a court venue.

It is appreciated that some court and tribunal users may find coming to a courthouse a worrying and perhaps stressful experience. We are committed to providing a high standard of customer care, to reduce the stress of the experience as much as possible. It will provide an informal but dignified setting with appropriate waiting areas and consultation rooms without close proximity to major criminal business. Officials will also arrange pre-hearing visits to help familiarise claimants with both the environment and procedures on the day and try to facilitate any requests to attend a hearing in an alternative venue in a timely manner.

St Patrick's Barracks: Former Military Housing

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16551/11-15, who is responsible for the legal process for the conveyance of the former military housing from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister to his Department.

(AQW 17252/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Departmental Solicitor's Office (DSO) is responsible for the legal conveyance of the former military housing at St Patrick's Barracks from the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister to the Department for Social Development.

The conveyance from OFMDFM to Fold Housing Association via my Department completed on 28 November 2012.

Employment and Support Allowance: Assessments

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what proportion of Employment and Support Allowance assessments are carried out at (i) Royston House, Belfast; (ii) the home of the applicant; and (iii) another location.

(AQW 17264/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare began providing medical assessment on behalf of the Social Security Agency on 20 June 2011. Since this date a total of 29,084 Employment and Support Allowance medical assessments have been carried out. Of this total:

- (i) 12,594 or 43.30% have been completed in the Belfast Medical Examination Centre at Royston House;
- (ii) 306 or 1.05% have been completed at the claimants home; and
- (iii) 16,184 or 55.65% have been completed at the 9 other Medical Examination Centres located throughout Northern Ireland.

Thompson House, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to Thompson House, Belfast, to detail (i) when applications for enhancements and upgrades were submitted; (ii) what they were; (iii) the total cost; (vi) who approved them; and (v) from what budget they were paid, including any funding provided from any external source.

(AQW 17265/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Thompson House has been in existence since 1985 and was previously owned and run by the Presbyterian Board of Social Witness. It had become unfit for purpose and Helm Housing Association agreed to take it over for renovation. Proposals for re-improvement were received by the Housing Executive on 23 December 2010 and approved by the Housing Executive on 16 February 2011.

The work involved bringing the existing building up to current standards, with an additional new build extension on the side. The previous facility housed 15 residents. This has now increased to 19 residents. The accommodation now comprises 15 x one person en suite bedrooms, which share a range of communal facilities including dining room and kitchen facilities and recreation, hobbies and sitting rooms. In addition, there are 4 x one person self contained apartments and 2 staff en suite bedrooms with associated staff and office facilities.

Given the project has only just completed and final accounts have yet to be received, the final costs have not yet been confirmed. However, at project approval stage, total cost of provision was assessed at £2.3million, including purchase of the property, construction and associated on costs including legal and administration costs. The Housing Executive approved Housing Association Grant totalling £2.1 million, with the balance financed by Helm Housing through private borrowing.

My Department, through the Housing Executive, has responsibility for the capital funding of all new social housing projects. This includes supported housing projects for a wide range of vulnerable groups, including ex-offenders. The £2.1 million grant towards the work to Thompson House was therefore funded from my Department's Social Housing Development Programme budget.

Housing Executive: Community Background of Applicants/Appointees

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development what is the total number and percentage of (i) Protestants; and (ii) Roman Catholics who (a) applied; and (b) were appointed to posts in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in the year ending 31 December 2012.

(AQW 17286/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested. However, the table below details the figures in relation to the total number and percentage of (i) Protestants and (ii) Roman Catholics who applied and were appointed to posts in the Housing Executive for the period 1 January to 29 November 2012.

	Protestant	Roman Catholic	Total
Applicants	132 (58.9%)	92 (41.1%)	224
Appointments	7 (46.7%)	8 (53.3%)	15

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Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development when his Department will conduct an evidence based review of the descriptors used in the Work Capability Assessment of Employment and Support Allowance.

(AQW 17319/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As part of his ongoing review of the Work Capability Assessment, Professor Malcolm Harrington tasked a number of charitable and representative groups, including Mind, Mencap and the National Autistic Society, to suggest refinements to the mental health function and fluctuating conditions descriptors.

In response to proposals from these groups the Social Security Agency, in conjunction with the Department for Work and Pensions, will conduct an evidence based review of the mental, intellectual and cognitive descriptors (including fluctuating conditions) used within the Work Capability Assessment in Spring/Summer 2013.

Welfare Reform: Support Services

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what discussions he has had with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to support services for people suffering from a mental illness during the transitional period in the changes in the welfare system.

(AQW 17320/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In implementing Welfare Reform, I am committed to supporting the needs of the most vulnerable in Northern Ireland. Whilst I have not yet met with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in relation to Welfare Reform, I have secured a commitment from Department for Work and Pensions Minister for Disabled People, Esther McVey, that in relation to Personal Independence Payment all views and concerns expressed from people and organisations in Northern Ireland will be carefully considered as they evaluate what further changes may be needed to ensure a fair reflection of disabled people's needs.

My officials continue to engage with Customer Representative Groups to understand customer views and concerns and reflect these in the planning and delivery of each of the Welfare Reform initiatives.

Universal Credit: Assistance with Online Applications

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what training and resources his Department will provide to assist people in their online application process for universal credit who (i) have never used the internet; (ii) have limited or no access to internet facilities; and (iii) due to disability or impairment, are unable to use the internet.

(AQW 17321/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Fresh claims and change of circumstances updates for Universal Credit in Northern Ireland will be available on a multi-channel basis. Claimants will have the option to make an application via the telephone or face-to-face as well as online. This is another key operational flexibility which I have secured for the people of Northern Ireland.

Research indicates that a significant number of people will be able to operate the online process successfully with little or no assistance. For those who do not have access to a computer or have limited access or are unable to use the internet, I am putting in place a number of measures to support the transition to online. This includes a Digital Inclusion programme, run within local communities using IT facilities, in either community centres or libraries, delivered by qualified instructors to improve IT literacy skills. There will also be Internet Access Points within the Jobs and Benefits offices to facilitate access for those without computers. As the introduction of the Universal Credit system will be phased I am also planning the introduction of a number of Assisted Digital services accessible by phone, email or Webchat to help people complete their online application process.

Welfare Reform: Cost of Delayed Implementation

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development for an estimate of the cost to the public purse caused by the delay in the implementation of Welfare Reform as a result of the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality Requirements; and how this estimate was calculated.

(AQW 17393/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current estimated cost to the Northern Ireland Block from potential delays in the Welfare Reform Bill not securing Royal Assent and the impact on the associated regulations is £18million.

This is based on a 3 month delay in the current timetable and represents an estimate of the annually managed expenditure controls which will not be achieved and the funding which may have to be found by the Northern Ireland Executive for the discretionary elements of Social Fund.

Under the Statement of Funding Policy, Northern Ireland's funding can be adjusted where the Northern Ireland Executive makes decisions or takes actions which result in additional costs to the UK Exchequer.

Figures are based on a three month delay and are pro rata business case financial estimates available for Employment and Support Allowance Contributory Time Limiting, Housing Benefit under occupancy, the Benefit Cap and the Discretionary Social Fund.

Northern Ireland currently uses Department for Work and Pension IT systems to administer calculate and pay benefits to its 600,000 customers. Additional costs of administrative work arounds, accessing later IT releases or using IT systems which the Department for Work and Pensions have updated or amended are excluded from the estimated costs of delay.

Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Boards: Elections

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development when elections were last held for representatives on Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Boards in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17450/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Formal elections are not held for representatives on Neighbourhood Renewal Partnership Boards. The overall aim of each Partnership is to secure balanced representation in respect of the Neighbourhood Renewal Area and membership should comprise key community, political, statutory and private sectors. Where a Partnership requires new or

additional representatives, it should identify how to fill that need and which individual(s) and/or organisation(s) should be approached. Any decision taken by the Partnership should reflect the principles of openness, transparency and inclusivity.

Double Glazing

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the rationale behind the change in the specification of hinges to be used in the Housing Executive's double-glazing schemes, from reversible to a standard casement hinge.
(AQO 3009/11-15)

Mr McCausland: When I came into office I was astounded to learn that the Housing Executive estimated that 48,000 of their homes required double glazing. I was even more concerned about the apparent lack of haste in dealing with this, as they originally planned to have this work completed by 2021. Therefore I ensured that in the Programme for Government, the Northern Ireland Executive gave a commitment that the thermal efficiency of all Housing Executive properties would be improved by 2014/15 through the provision of double glazing.

However, I also had to ensure that the double glazing programme delivered value for money for the tenants of the Housing Executive and the tax payers of Northern Ireland.

That is why, earlier this year I asked the Housing Executive to research the specifications used as I was concerned that the Housing Executive's specification for the supply and fitting of double glazing did not offer best value for money and also that the specification for hinges and handles was much higher than the industry standards for domestic properties. I was advised that there was potential for significant savings and following the review significant savings have been identified.

The Housing Executive has now advised me that their rationale for varying the performance related standard specification is: -

- to address capacity concerns from a delivery perspective;
- effect cost savings in the window manufacture, glazing and hinge arrangements; and
- to widen out the manufacturer supply base from what was historically a very narrow supply area.

Alternative Energy

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Social Development what measures are available to encourage alternative energy sources to help reduce householders' over reliance on oil as their main energy source.
(AQO 3010/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In September 2012, I launched a new Boiler Replacement Scheme, following on from the pilot scheme which ended in March 2012. The new scheme offers a grant to of up to £1,000 towards the cost of replacing old, inefficient boilers, if the householders have an income of less than £40,000.

Householders with an income of up to £20,000 could be eligible for a maximum grant of £1,000 and householders who earn between £20,000 and £40,000 could be eligible for a maximum grant of up to £500.

The level of grant will depend on whether householders replace oil with oil or oil with gas or indeed they can arrange to install a wood pellet boiler. Householders can choose an installer of their choice as long as they are appropriately qualified.

The Housing Executive has received almost 22,000 expressions of interest in the scheme and over 15,000 application forms have been issued. £12 million has been allocated to the scheme over the next three years, with £4 million available for grants before the end of March 2013.

Double Glazing

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's double-glazing scheme for properties in Ballyclare.
(AQO 3011/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has a total of 514 tenanted properties in Ballyclare and 369 of these are included in a double glazing scheme which is provisionally due to start in September 2013 and end in January 2014, at an estimated cost of £611,000 within its programme of improvement and maintenance schemes.

Alcohol: Irresponsible Consumption

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the work to tackle irresponsible alcohol consumption.
(AQO 3012/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Dealing with the problem of Irresponsible consumption of alcohol is primarily a matter for my colleague the Minister for Health. My Department is responsible for policy in respect of liquor licensing and I have been concerned for some time about the way in which alcohol is promoted and marketed. In particular I am concerned about promotions that encourage young people to buy and consume more alcohol than is good for them.

Earlier today the Assembly approved the introduction of regulations to ban irresponsible drinks promotions such as, "all you can drink for £20". This will come into operation from 1st January next year.

I have also endorsed the drink industry's Code of Practice on responsible retailing of alcohol. The code seeks to promote best practice and to prevent alcohol being irresponsibly promoted, served or sold.

The drinks industry has appointed an independent complaints panel that oversee the implementation of the code and deal with all complaints.

My officials are continuing to work with officials in the Health department on the introduction of minimum unit pricing in Northern Ireland. Before a final decision is taken we need to understand the impact of such a policy. Research into the impact will be commissioned shortly. I was encouraged by the announcement last week of the UK Government's plan to consult on the introduction of minimum unit pricing. Scotland passed legislation on this matter earlier this year. We will continue to watch developments in England and Scotland very closely.

Living Over the Shop Scheme

Mr I McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development, in light of the recently launched Housing Strategy, how his Department will take forward the Living Over the Shops scheme.
(AQO 3013/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am keen to hear consultees' views on how the proposal for a re-vitalised Living over the Shops Initiative, and all other proposals within the Housing Strategy, should be taken forward. On considering consultation responses, and subject to securing the necessary resources, I will agree how this and other proposals within the Housing Strategy can be taken forward. This proposal will of course clearly link with my Department's Urban Regeneration Framework and the work currently being taken forward to revitalise our towns and cities. It presents a real opportunity to bring life back to our town centres, creating vibrant spaces for all and help address the need for more one bedroom accommodation arising for the Welfare Reform changes.

Social Security Agency: Fraud and Error

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the levels of fraud and error in the Social Security benefit expenditure.
(AQO 3014/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Significant progress has been made in reducing fraud and error. The Social Security Agency operates a rigorous benefit security strategy which has resulted in a steady reduction in losses through fraud and error, from £109m in 2002/03 to £39.9m in 2011. The current performance is the best ever.

Put into context, £39.9m now represents 0.9% of the Agency's £4.5bn annual expenditure, compared to 1.1% in 2010. The 2011 result is made up of £13.2m or 0.3% official error, £7.3m or 0.2% customer error and £19.4m or 0.4% customer fraud.

The Agency also estimates the level of underpayments arising from official and customer error. Identifying those cases not receiving their full entitlement and correcting benefit payments is an integral part of the Agency's business. Total underpayments in the Agency reduced to 0.4% of benefit expenditure in 2011 compared to 0.5% in 2010.

Social Housing: One- and Two-bedroom Units

Mr Byrne asked the Minister for Social Development whether the £8 million transferred from the social housing new build programme could have been used to build small one or two bedroom units to help meet demand following the introduction of the under occupancy legislation.
(AQO 3015/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The transfer of £8 million from the Social Housing Development Programme to the Co-Ownership Scheme was the result of efficiencies achieved in the delivery of a number of social housing schemes throughout the 2012/13 financial year.

There has been a failure to provide small one and two bedroom units in previous years and the Programme for 2012/13 did not include any one bedroom units, failing to take account of the forthcoming Welfare Reform changes. I was not prepared to accept this and asked my Department, in conjunction with the Housing Executive, to have the Housing Associations submit proposals on how schemes for one and two bedroom units may be brought forward.

A number of pilots for one and two bedroom units have now been launched and my Department, and the Housing Executive, will assess the outcomes of these pilots, as well as the potential to convert existing supply to one bed units or shared accommodation, to inform the composition of the future Social Housing Development Programme for 2013/14 and beyond. However, given the limited timescale in which to formulate new schemes that would deliver additional one and two bed units, it would not have been possible to utilise £8 million of expenditure within the remainder of the financial year.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Assembly Committee Papers

Lord Morrow asked the Assembly Commission for an estimate of the savings, per annum, since the folders and binders used for Assembly committee papers have been recycled.

(AQW 17040/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The recycling of folders and binders commenced in early 2010. Unfortunately it is not possible to isolate binders and folders solely used for committee papers from all other Assembly business. However, the total savings for the Assembly since they have been recycled is £3,335.52 or 89% for calendar year 2010. This is further illustrated in the table set out overleaf.

The slight increase observed in 2012 to date is due to the large amount of folders and binders gathered during Dissolution in 2011 that have been reused on numerous occasions and are now required to be replaced.

Product Description	Unit of Issue	2010 (Jan-Dec)		2011 (Jan-Dec)		2012 (Jan-Dec)	
		Quantity	Sales	Quantity	Sales	Quantity	Sales
A4 Lever Arch File	Pack10	0	0.00	2	6.60	48	159.57
Banner Pob A4 2R Binder 25Mm Black	Box10	0	0.00	17	39.30	155	394.52
Banner Pob A4 2R Binder 25Mm Green	Box10	0	0.00	1	2.50	0	0.00
Banner Pob A4 2R Binder 25Mm Yellow	Box10	0	0.00	1	2.50	0	0.00
Banner Pp A4 2R Binder 25Mm Black	Pack12	193	3,037.82	12	188.88	0	0.00
Banner Pp A4 2R Binder 25Mm Blue	Pack12	7	110.18	0	0.00	0	0.00
Banner Pp A4 2R Binder 25Mm Red	Pack12	6	94.44	0	0.00	0	0.00
Banner Pp A4 2R Binder 25Mm Green	Pack12	7	110.18	0	0.00	0	0.00
Banner Pp A4 2R Binder 25Mm Yellow	Pack12	7	110.18	0	0.00	0	0.00
Banner L/Arch File Fs Port 70Mm Cl	Pack10	66	204.60	32	101.40	33	110.26
Banner L/Arch File A4 Port 70Mm Cl	Pack10	26	80.60	23	71.30	0	0.00
Total			£3,748.00		£412.48		£664.35

Parliament Buildings: Flags

Mr Hazzard asked the Assembly Commission which two flags were flying from Parliament Buildings on 20 November 2012; and to outline the rationale behind the decision to fly these flags on that day.

(AQW 17085/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The arrangements for the flying of the Union flag from government buildings in Northern Ireland are set out by the Flags Regulations (NI) 2000, as amended by the Flags Regulation (NI) (Amendment) 2002. The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission follows these Regulations.

The two flags flying from Parliament Buildings on 20 November 2012 were Union flags, to mark the occasion of the anniversary of the wedding of Her Majesty the Queen. This anniversary is one of the designated days under the above Regulations. (Copy attached)

2012

DAYS FOR HOISTING FLAGS ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FLAGS REGULATIONS

- 20 January Birthday of The Countess of Wessex
- 6 February Her Majesty's Accession
- 19 February Birthday of The Duke of York
- 10 March Birthday of The Earl of Wessex
- 12 March Commonwealth Day#
- 17 March St Patrick's Day
- 21 April Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen

- 9 May Europe Day
- 2 June Coronation Day
- 10 June Birthday of The Duke of Edinburgh
- 16 June The Queen's Official Birthday*
- 15 August Birthday of The Princess Royal
- 11 November Remembrance Sunday**
- 14 November Birthday of The Prince of Wales
- 20 November Anniversary of Her Majesty's Wedding

NOTE:

- # Commonwealth Day is the second Monday in March
- * The day appointed for the official celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday
- ** Remembrance Sunday is the second Sunday in November. Flags should be flown right up all day and not at half- mast.
- \ Dates confirmed by publication in the Belfast Gazette on Friday 27 January 2012

On the above days flags should fly from 8am until sunset

Parliament Buildings: Flags

Mr Campbell asked the Assembly Commission whether the same dimensions of Union Flag are flown from the two flagpoles on Parliament Buildings on each of the designated days,

(AQW 17103/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): When the Union flag is to be flown at Parliament Buildings, a decision is made prior to hoisting the flag, as to which of two sizes of flags is to be used, i.e. a full size flag (dimensions: 12 ft x 6 ft) or a 'storm' flag (dimensions: 7 ½ ft x 3 ¾ ft). The decision is subjective and is based upon prevailing weather conditions. In poor weather, as was the case on 20 November 2012, two storm flags are normally flown. Health and safety must also be a consideration, as in strong winds or wet weather, a full size flag may break the flagpole and present a risk to persons below.

Assembly Gift Shop

Mr Flanagan asked the Assembly Commission whether there are any plans to commission additional sporting memorabilia, such as Gaelic footballs, sliotar or hurls for sale in the Assembly Gift Shop.

(AQW 17226/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): There are no specific plans to commission additional sporting memorabilia for retail in the Assembly Gift Shop.

There are two methods by which the Assembly decides on products that are to be sold in the Assembly Gift Shop;

- (i) Items that are purchased by our contractor, Eures, for sale in the Gift Shop. These are purchased with the agreement of Support Services Office, and are usually bespoke items that contain the Assembly blue flax crest, and are therefore extremely popular amongst the many visitors who attend Parliament Buildings each year. The Eures policy on the procurement of gifts is that Gifts for retail sale are procured from local companies where possible. The range of gifts with the NI Assembly crest is placed with NI firms who provide employment for local people. Most gifts are manufactured or processed within N.I.
- (ii) Items that are selected via the Designer Makers Initiative. The overarching aim of this initiative is for the Northern Ireland Assembly to work in collaboration with Craft NI in order to encourage a variety of makers from throughout Northern Ireland to apply to showcase their goods in the Assembly Gift and Coffee Shop. A third Designer Makers Initiative commenced on Wednesday, 1 November 2012 in the Assembly Gift & Coffee Shop. The Initiative has proved to be very popular in recent years and the current Initiative will run for six months ending on 30 April 2013.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Commission welcomes applications from throughout Northern Ireland and have been encouraged to see a diverse range of products put forward to date for showcasing in the Gift Shop.

Further information relating to the opportunity to apply for the next Designer Makers Initiative will be placed on the Craft NI website via <http://craftni.org/outlets/northern-ireland-assembly-gift-shop/>

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 14 December 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Programme for Government

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why the milestone of '1175 jobs promoted through the public, community and private sectors' is not included as a target in their Departmental Plan 2012/13, even though it is detailed in the Programme for Government in relation to the development of the One Plan.

(AQW 14294/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The OFMDFM Business Plan relates to our high level objective for developing and co-ordinating the One Plan across government departments to ensure its success. OFMDFM has established an inter departmental group to work towards achieving the objectives of the One Plan. The commitment within the Programme for Government was to support the work of the One Plan.

North/South Bodies

Mrs D Kelly asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department is making any plans to utilise the North-South bodies to gain full advantage from the forthcoming Irish Presidency of the EU.

(AQO 2566/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We recognise that there may be opportunities for us associated with the Irish EU Presidency between January and June 2013. We have discussed this with the Irish Government on a number of occasions, most recently at the NSMC Plenary meeting on 2 November 2012 where Ministers recognised the importance of engagement in order to maximise mutual benefit from the Presidency.

The Irish Government has offered to brief Executive Ministers on presidency related issues and to invite Ministers, including those with responsibilities for the NSMC Areas of Co-operation and North South Implementation Bodies, to presidency related meetings and events relevant to their areas of responsibility.

Unanswered Questions

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why AQW 14294/11-15 has not been answered.

(AQW 16153/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answer to AQW 14294/11-15 issued on 10 December 2012.

Maze Regeneration Board

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to reconcile the figure of 14 being deemed appointable in the March 2012 competition for the Maze Regeneration Board, as shown in the answer to AQW 15654/11-15, and the figure of 16 which appears in the answer to AQW 15657/11-15.

(AQW 16416/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: There were 16 successful applications from 14 applicants for the Maze/Long Kesh Chair and Board Member positions in the March 2012 competition.

Two of the 14 successful applicants had applied for both the Chair and Board Member positions.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what practices, protocols and measures are in place within the Department and its arm's-length bodies to ensure prompt payment to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16797/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: OFMDFM and its sponsored bodies take all possible steps to pay suppliers as promptly as possible. The initial target for payment is to meet the 10-day prompt payment commitment made by the Executive in response to the current economic position.

In addition, the Department and all ALBs are legally bound to meet the terms of the Late Payment of Commercial debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended and supplemented by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002. This requires that all payments should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice.

To meet the 10-day and 30-day requirements, the Department and ALBs review their performance on a monthly basis against these two targets.

The annual accounts of the Department and each of its ALBs contain a note on the performance against the 30-day target each the financial year.

For construction contracts, procured through the Central Procurement Directorate, main contractors are required to comply with the 'Code of Practice for Government Construction Clients and their Supply Chains'. The Code sets out the core principles that should govern the behaviour of clients, contractors and subcontractors, including the need for fair dealing within the supply chain.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether the Social Investment Fund will provide additional resources to the projects and programmes already addressing the issues identified, or will new competing programmes be established.

(AQW 16866/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Social Investment Fund (SIF) will be targeted at addressing identified and evidenced need in eligible areas within each social investment zone. It will be for steering groups in consultation with the wider community to propose the interventions which best address such needs and include the detail of these in a strategic area plan.

This may include further roll out of existing interventions, which have demonstrated impact, or indeed new interventions. Regardless of whether proposals are new or an enhancement of existing, all interventions must demonstrate additionality to be successful for SIF funding.

Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what consideration has been given to people from Northern Ireland who, as children, were placed in Protestant institutions in the Republic of Ireland and who suffered institutional abuse, given that their circumstances were not investigated by the Ryan Inquiry and are unlikely to be included in the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry.

(AQW 16968/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: As these allegations fall outside the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Executive, they cannot be investigated by the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse here.

We have registered our concerns about this group of victims and survivors with Alan Shatter TD, who is considering the issue.

Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what support mechanisms are in place for residents of Northern Ireland who, as children, were placed in Protestant institutions in the Republic of Ireland and who suffered institutional abuse.

(AQW 16969/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Support is currently available for any victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse through Lifeline, who can be contacted 24 hours a day on 0808 808 8000. Lifeline counsellors will help callers to get through the initial crisis and then refer callers to other support.

The NI Direct website Historical Institutional Abuse page, as well as providing information about the Inquiry and Lifeline contact details, provides other key contacts that victims and survivors may find useful.

Historical Institutional Abuse

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what progress has been made in establishing an advocacy service for victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse; and what will be the criteria for availing of such a service.

(AQW 16970/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: By December we expect to have tendered a contract, to provide a support service to victims and survivors of historical institutional abuse in the following areas:

- Trauma Counselling and support

- Housing advice
- Information on benefit entitlements
- Support to search for records relating to their time in institutions
- Information on training and employment supports and opportunities
- PSNI referrals for those wishing to pursue criminal proceedings against perpetrators of abuse.

European Year for Active Ageing

Mr McClarty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what plans they have to secure protection from age discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services during this European Year for Active Ageing.
(AQW 17303/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government includes a commitment to make it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on the basis of age in the provision of goods, facilities and services. This will require new legislation to be taken through the Assembly.

There are a considerable number of steps which have to be undertaken prior to a new Bill being introduced to the Assembly. We are currently at the policy development stage which is essential to ensure that the legislation achieves the intended outcome.

Freedom of Information Requests

Ms Ruane asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how many of the Freedom of Information requests received by their Department in the last two years were not answered within 20 working days.
(AQO 2975/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The information requested is published within the FOI Annual Reports for 2010 and 2011, which can be accessed from the OFMDFM website at:

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/information_management_and_central_advisory_branch/annual-reports-and-statistics.htm.

British Prime Minister: Meeting

Mr Byrne asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on their meeting with the British Prime Minister on 20 November 2012.
(AQO 2997/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We had a very useful meeting with the Prime Minister during his visit on 20 November 2012.

We discussed at length issues impacting on our local economy, including Welfare Reform, and the general implications of devolving Corporation Tax.

We also discussed issues around the decision made by the Prime Minister to bring the G8 meeting to Enniskillen next June.

Other matters covered during the discussion included our local political situation, the shortfall in capital spend and issues relating to Cohesion, Sharing and Integration and the progress we are making with our strategy in that regard. More internationally, we touched upon the current political difficulties that have been widely publicised in the Middle East.

Signature Projects

Mrs McKeivitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the six signature projects announced on 10 October 2012.
(AQO 2998/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: On 10 October 2012 we announced the development of six significant signature programmes under the Delivering Social Change delivery framework.

These Signature Programmes are designed to tackle multi-generational poverty and to improve children's health and wellbeing, and educational and life opportunities.

It is also the intention that the programmes will stimulate economic growth and tackle dereliction through encouraging social enterprise in communities.

Following on from the Ministerial announcement, lead departments and Senior Responsible Owners have been identified.

Departments were asked to urgently develop Outline Delivery Plans and Projected Expenditure Profiles, for each Programme, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity. This work is currently underway.

Rt Hon Peter D Robinson MLA
First Minister

Martin McGuinness MP MLA
deputy First Minister

Active Ageing Strategy

Mr Sheehan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to outline how the older persons sector has been involved in the development of the Active Ageing Strategy.

(AQO 3001/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In developing the Active Ageing Strategy, OFMDFM officials have worked closely with the Ageing Strategy Advisory Group. The Group includes representatives of many of the organisations that work with older people here including Age NI and the Age Sector Platform and also represented are older people who are active in the voluntary and community sector. It is chaired by Claire Keatinge, the Commissioner for Older People.

Officials have benefitted enormously from the regular meetings with the Advisory Group in recent months and its expertise and advice have led to the draft Strategy being extensively reworked to reflect best practice.

Junior Ministers also met with Claire Keatinge and representatives from the age sector to discuss the development of the Strategy.

Officials are currently working with the Advisory Group on the Early Actions Plan to implement the Strategy. Once finalised, we will have a Strategy and Early Actions Plan, the content of which has been strongly influenced by both older people and people who work closely with older people. We intend to publicly consult on the finalised Strategy in February or March of next year.

Investment Strategy

Mr McElduff asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether there is any opportunity for further capital investment programmes in addition to those within the Investment Strategy.

(AQO 3003/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Investment Strategy 2011-21 that we published in the Assembly in October sets out the Executive's high-level strategy to address the economic, social and environmental infrastructure needs of the region up to 2021. Over the period up to March 2015 some £5.1 billion of new capital investment will be delivered across the region, improving public service delivery and providing much needed employment in the construction and related sectors of our economy. Over the full period of the Strategy it is planned to invest £13.3 billion.

The Investment Strategy is not, however, exhaustive. Although priority schemes are listed in the document, Ministers have flexibility to alter plans and to bring forward new and additional schemes within their agreed ISNI budget settlement where they consider they better reflect local needs and circumstances at the time.

Robust capital monitoring procedures are also in place to identify quickly any funding that, for whatever reason, cannot be spent as planned and to reallocate such money to other priority investment schemes that can deliver output in the year concerned. This provides a regular opportunity for Ministers to access additional funding for schemes that could be delivered in the time available but would otherwise be delayed because of lack of funding. It may also be possible for Ministers to identify suitable projects which are close to deliverable if additional capital funding became available.

However it is important that we spend our capital money wisely and rigorous processes are in place to ensure that funding goes where it will do the most good to the economy and the community. This inevitably means that there is a considerable lead in time for major projects, which is why we publish the Investment Strategy on a 10-year cycle to ensure that investment decisions are made in good time relative to the availability of funding.

Unanswered Questions

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why they have not yet answered AQWs 14294/11-15 and 16153/11-15.

(AQW 17762/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answers to AQW 14294/11-15 AQW 16153/11-15 issued on 10 December 2012.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Animal Cruelty

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how organisations, charities and dog breeders can be informed if someone has been convicted of animal cruelty or been banned before giving or selling animals to them.

(AQW 16215/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Public access to any database or register of animal welfare offenders raises significant legal issues particularly on the implications for human rights and data protection legislation. Such matters would have to be considered in great detail before any decision could be made.

In the New Year, my officials will be engaging with the Department of Justice, the PSNI and the Councils to discuss issues including access to information relating to animal welfare court cases and the sharing of such information amongst enforcement bodies.

As regards dogs, under the Dogs Order 1983 it is an offence to keep a dog without a valid licence, and before a person takes possession of a dog, that person must obtain a dog licence for that particular dog. As a person who has been banned from keeping a dog, under animal welfare legislation, cannot obtain or hold a dog licence, it is a requirement that a person applying for a dog licence from a Council signs a declaration stating that he or she is not disqualified from keeping a dog. Where a licence has been falsely obtained by a disqualified person, the dog licence becomes void and an offence of possessing a dog without a licence has been committed.

Regarding organisations, charities and dog breeders who supply dogs, it is an offence under the Dogs Order 1983 for any person to give or sell a dog to any other person without first seeing a current dog licence for that particular dog or a block licence which is valid for that dog.

Animals Exported for Slaughter

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of live animals that have been exported for slaughter in each of the last four year, including the destinations; (ii) the number of animal welfare inspections that were carried out on live exports by her Department during this period; (iii) the number of violations the inspections discovered; and (iv) whether her Department has any policy regarding the slaughter of exported livestock in a manner which is illegal in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 16636/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Note:- Figures for 2012 are not for the full Calendar Year

(i) Cattle Exported for Direct Slaughter

	GB	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	7,685	14,175	0	21,860
2009	10,166	7,008	0	17,174
2010	8,380	3,413	0	11,793
2011	5,675	10,602	0	16,277
2012	7,211	8,542	0	15,753

Sheep Exported for Direct Slaughter

	GB	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	13,806	249,397	0	263,203
2009	2,293	251,941	0	254,234
2010	2,664	363,279	0	365,943
2011	580	488,807	0	489,387
2012	2,813	377,025	0	379,838

Pigs Exported for Direct Slaughter

	Great Britain	South of Ireland	Other	Total
2008	4,089	6,790	0	10,879
2009	14,883	1,016	0	15,899
2010	9,661	4,524	0	14,185
2011	14,448	5,116	0	19,564
2012	20,170	5,477	0	25,647

- (ii) The number of Animal Welfare Inspections carried out on consignments of live exports is - 10,881 - broken down:

2009	2758
2010	2900
2011	2289
2012	2934

- (iii) The number of violations inspections discovered is – 136 - broken down

2009	19
2010	40
2011	37
2012	40

- (iv) Animals being exported directly for slaughter have only been consigned to Britain or the South of Ireland in recent times. For both this internal and intra-Community trade, the policy is governed by EC trade & welfare legislation

Agrifood: Innovation

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what steps are being taken to ensure that extra funds are being directed to innovation in the agri-food industry.

(AQW 17233/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I recognise that the agri-food industry must innovate to make the most of the latest ideas, techniques and working practices so it can open up new market opportunities, grow and become more profitable.

The DARD Evidence and Innovation Strategy 2009-13 provides an over-arching framework for all DARD funded Research and Development and represents my Department's contribution to promoting innovation in the north. In addition to our annual investment of around £8.5 million on the DARD Directed Research Work Programme (which includes innovation) at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), and the DARD Postgraduate Studentships, we are planning additional expenditure in excess of £1,000,000 in 2013/14.

This additional expenditure will mainly be available through the Research Challenge Fund (RCF), with a further £60,000 being allocated to create a new EU research funding facilitator post.

The RCF is open to Small to Medium Enterprises, large enterprises and levy bodies. It aims to encourage industry and public sector research establishments to collaborate on innovative, high quality, pre-commercial research and technological development projects. The RCF has to date awarded grants to 11 industry led projects, worth around £1,370,000. These projects have the potential to further the sustainability and competitiveness of the north's agri-food and rural enterprises. The third tranche of RCF is currently open for applications.

Our excellent local research facilities and expertise also gives us an opportunity to access new European research funding, available under Horizon 2020, from 2013 onwards. In order to maximise the potential benefits of Horizon 2020 I recently announced that DARD would fund a local EU research funding facilitator to support businesses and researchers in the area of Food Security, Agriculture and the Bio economy. This new post, which will be based in AFBI, should help by informing local businesses and researchers about other available funding streams and help them access European funding for the research they need to do.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) under what conditions an inspector is accompanied by an immediate supervisor when completing an inspection under the Countryside Management Scheme; and (ii) in what percentage of inspections this scenario would be applied.

(AQW 17278/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: (i) A supervisor may accompany a Countryside Management Scheme inspector when carrying out re-performance checks. Re-performance checks are required as a control measure by the EC to quality assure inspections. These checks ensure that inspectors comply with EC Regulations and reduce the risk of incorrect payments being made to claimants. These checks also identify any inconsistencies in approach to inspections and any potential training needs. Other circumstances where a supervisor may accompany an inspector are when inspections are of a complex nature or where there may be potential for conflict.

- (ii) Approximately four percent of all agri-environment inspections will be carried out with a supervisor in attendance.

Single Farm Payment: Disallowance

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what is the expected percentage reduction in the Single Farm Payment Schemes in 2009 and 2010 as a result of the European Commission disallowance.

(AQW 17294/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The financial correction for 2009 has not been finally confirmed, but is expected to be 5.19 percent. The financial correction for 2010 is currently estimated at 3 per cent.

Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the £16.2 million that has been invested in 69 projects through the Processing and Marketing Grant Scheme since July 2008, how much was invested in projects in the North Antrim area.

(AQW 17299/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Since 2008, my Department has approved funding of £1.9 million to 9 projects in the North Antrim area under the Processing & Marketing Grant Scheme (PMG). Details of the companies awarded funding are:

Company	Location
Chipmaster Ltd	Broughshane
Doherty & Gray Ltd	Ballymena
Ballygarvey Eggs Ltd	Ballymena
Ballymena Farm Shop	Ballymena
Red Heifer Ltd	Clooughmills
Glenview Foods Ltd	Ballycastle
K & G MacAtamney Butchery Ltd	Ballymena
Glens of Antrim Potatoes Ltd	Cushendall
Ballyeamonn Eggs	Cushendall

Field Boundary Restoration

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on when all the payments for field boundary restoration work completed in 2011 will be issued.

(AQW 17329/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Field Boundary Restoration (FBR) is an important habitat enhancement option within the NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) and as such is paid as part of a scheme participant's annual NICMS claim and not as a separate payment.

Payments for 2011 NICMS claims began on 27/9/2012 and at 4/12/2012 there have been 494 payments made from 907 claims. The timescale of payment for the remaining claims is determined by a number of factors including the findings at inspection and the number of errors discovered during the claim validation process.

Unfortunately, because of the high number of over-declarations we have discovered during earlier inspections of FBR claims for 2011, we have had to carry out additional Rapid Field Visit inspections. This is in-line with EU legislation and the additional workload associated with these inspections has delayed payments for many of those who claimed FBR. We cannot make payments until we are satisfied that all claims are accurate and valid, however we are striving to pay all remaining claims as quickly as possible.

Carlingford Lough: Tidal Waterway

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development where the legislative competence lies in relation to any obstruction of the navigable tidal waterway that is Carlingford Lough.

(AQW 17379/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Warrenpoint Harbour Authority is responsible for the maintenance of the navigation channel in the Lough.

Departmental Headquarters: Relocation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what other sites were considered as options when making the decision to relocate the Department's headquarters.

(AQW 17430/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There were 23 potential locations considered for the relocation of my departmental headquarters. These are listed below.

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|------------------|
| ■ Antrim | ■ Coleraine | ■ Limavady |
| ■ Ards | ■ Cookstown | ■ Lisburn |
| ■ Armagh | ■ Craigavon | ■ Newry & Mourne |
| ■ Ballymena | ■ Derry | ■ Newtownabbey |
| ■ Banbridge | ■ Down | ■ North Down |
| ■ Belfast | ■ Dungannon | ■ Omagh |
| ■ Carrickfergus | ■ Fermanagh | ■ Strabane |
| ■ Castlereagh | ■ Larne | |

Departmental Headquarters

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 16628/11-15, why this Ministerial Direction was issued; and why the appraisal was deemed necessary.

(AQW 17431/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Standard procedure would be to appraise fully all options, even those which would not meet the Executive's commitment in the Programme for Government to advance the relocation of DARD HQ to a rural area. As you will appreciate, this would result in considerable nugatory work.

I have therefore directed my officials to carry out an appraisal which looks only at options on the Ballykelly site.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why she has suspended the recruitment process for members of an advisory board for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education; and how many people have applied for a position on the board.

(AQW 17435/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recruitment process for members of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education Advisory Group was terminated because the pool of eligible candidates was insufficient in terms of numbers and representation across all of the required sectors. Fourteen people applied for positions on the College Advisory Group.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the current recruitment process for board members for an advisory board to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education; and what plans she has to improve this process.

(AQW 17436/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recruitment process for members of the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education Advisory Group was terminated because the pool of eligible candidates was insufficient in terms of numbers and representation across all of the required sectors. A review of the recruitment process and the associated selection criteria is nearing completion and my Department expects to undertake a new recruitment competition in early 2013. It is hoped that the revised application process will encourage a higher number of applicants who can meet the eligibility criteria.

College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what essential and desirable skills are required from applicants to the advisory board to the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Education.

(AQW 17437/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The recent recruitment process for membership of the CAFRE College Advisory Group used the following essential eligibility criteria:

- (i) a detailed knowledge and understanding of the sector the applicant wished to represent; and
- (ii) at least 3 years in the last 10 years of working in that sector in a role which involved making management decisions.

In addition applicants were required to demonstrate:

- (i) A sound understanding of the main issues associated with the 5 DARD Strategic Goals;
- (ii) Proven communication and representation skills; and
- (iii) Experience of analysing problems and evaluating information to make recommendations.

My Department is currently reviewing the recruitment process and associated selection criteria and expects to undertake a new recruitment competition in early 2013.

Farming Community: Representation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how her Department ensures that there is adequate and equitable representation from the farming community on the relevant boards and fora; and how the various farming sectors, such as beef, sheep, cereals, potatoes, dairy and horticulture can be represented on, and have input into, these various Boards and fora.

(AQW 17439/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Equality is central to my Department's policy and decision-making processes. The Department recognises the important role and contribution made by representatives from the various farming sectors and, in order to ensure adequate representation on any boards/fora, aims to identify those groups or individuals that will be affected by any specific programme, scheme or initiative.

Careful consideration is given to the need for appropriate representation which will adequately reflect the views and concerns of the farming community and the Department seeks to encourage participation from a wide range of individuals and organisations, utilising both the formal public appointments process (in accordance with the Code of Practice for Ministerial Public Appointments) and informal stakeholder approach (where the Department endeavours to ensure equitable representation from interested parties).

Farming Community: Representation

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what external advice she has taken to ensure that the widest pool of talent and expertise are represented on relevant Boards and fora; and how she plans to attract adequate and equitable representation from the farming community to these Boards and fora.

(AQW 17440/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department draws upon external advice where appropriate. For example, in relation to the Rural Development Programme (RDP) Monitoring Committee (for the 2007-2013 Programme) and the RDP 2014-2020 Programme development stakeholder group, representation is sought in accordance with guidance from the European Commission. Similarly, public appointments are conducted in line with the Code of Practice published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

The Department is keen to ensure that all relevant stakeholders are suitably represented on boards/fora and, for example, addresses the need to attract representation by suitable advertising in the local daily press and weekly agricultural press as well as writing directly to Agri-food/industry organisations, professional bodies and Section 75 groups.

Animal Transportation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what consideration she has given to developing a policy to set standards for the transport of live animals higher than those required by EU law.

(AQW 17483/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Council Regulation (EC) No 1/2005, on the protection of animals during transport and related operations, came into force on 5 January 2007. The Regulation was transposed here through the introduction of The Welfare of Animals (Transport) Regulations 2006 (as amended).

Regulation 1/2005 covers the transport of all live vertebrate animals within the EU that takes place in connection with an economic activity. This is considered to be any transport of animals undertaken as part of a business or commercial activity which incurs financial gain, whether direct or indirect.

This legislation imposes tough conditions on the transport industry, particularly in relation to export journeys, including the need for observance of maximum journey times and rest periods, validated journey logs for each journey, specially approved vehicles, prior authorisation of the transporter and competency training of drivers.

My Department works with EU Member States to ensure consistent and even handed enforcement of the Transport Regulations.

At this time I have no plans to develop higher standards than these.

Dangerous Dogs

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many dogs have been destroyed in each of the last five years as a result of being classified as dangerous.

(AQW 17487/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Dog control is legislated for here by the Dogs Order 1983, as amended by the Dogs (Amendment) Act 2011. Councils enforce this legislation and are required to provide statistics to my Department regarding its operation.

The term 'dangerous dog' is not defined in the dog control legislation here and could mean two things, either;

- 1) a dog of a banned type, for example a pitbull; or
- 2) a dog of any kind that has attacked a person.

The statistics that the Councils have provided up to 2011 cover only the number of destruction orders issued by a Court following the prosecution of a dog owner whose dog has attacked a person. The figures for each of the last 5 years are set out in the table below.

Year	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Destruction orders issued	15	6	7	8	5

Departmental Headquarters: Location

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to list the locations considered for her Department's new headquarters.

(AQW 17494/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: There were 23 potential locations considered for the relocation of my departmental headquarters. These are listed below.

- Antrim
- Ards
- Armagh
- Ballymena
- Banbridge
- Belfast
- Carrickfergus
- Castlereagh
- Coleraine
- Cookstown
- Craigavon
- Derry
- Down
- Dungannon
- Fermanagh
- Larne
- Limavady
- Lisburn
- Newry & Mourne
- Newtownabbey
- North Down
- Omagh
- Strabane

Forest Service

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the measures or programmes that Forest Service can initiate to help integrate forest parks and local communities.

(AQW 17530/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Our forests already deliver significant recreational and social benefits for local communities and I am keen to see this built upon. A key measure to encourage the development of community involvement with our forests is the establishment of working partnerships with local government.

This is in line with my vision is for improved partnership working with local government and other bodies to make sure that forests play as full a role as possible in supporting regional and local recreational and tourism agendas.

Good progress has been made with several councils in the development of partnership arrangements, expressed in the form of memoranda of understanding and development licences and this has led to the improvement of recreation and tourism facilities within forests.

River Inspection Reports

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when does a River Inspection Report become public information.

(AQW 17565/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Once a river inspection report is finalised and complete, Rivers Agency would make it available to the public on request, subject to Departmental guidelines, and data protection on the release of information.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an estimate of the cost of removing trees infected by Ash Dieback.

(AQW 17570/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: At 5 December 2012, the direct costs incurred by Forest Service associated with removing trees affected by Ash Dieback amounted to approximately £2,300.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development when did her Department formally notified the Criminal Justice Inspectorate of the existence of the Central Investigation Service within her Department.

(AQW 17635/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department is not listed as one of the organisations that comes under the Criminal Justice Inspectorate's (CJI) statutory remit to inspect organisations. DARD is, therefore, under no obligation to formally notify the CJI of the

existence of the Central Investigation Service (CIS). However, I can confirm that the CIS has liaised with CJI in the past and, as a consequence, the CJI are fully aware of the existence of CIS.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline which external organisation reviews the changes made in the Central Investigation Service following the recommendations made in the Deloitte review.

(AQW 17636/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The report by Deloitte on the Department's Central Investigation Service (CIS) was issued on 28 July 2010 and contained 10 recommendations, all of which were accepted.

External scrutiny was provided by the NIAO review of the policies and procedures in place in CIS in the context of financial audit work undertaken on the Department's 2010/11 Resource Account.

In addition, a follow up review of CIS by the Department's own Internal Audit Branch has recently been completed and a satisfactory opinion has been provided.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the running costs of the Central Investigation Unit for each of the last five years.

(AQW 17656/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The running costs to DARD of the Central Investigation Service for each of the last 5 financial years are as follows:

2008/09	£172,000
2009/10	£148,000
2010/11	£122,000
2011/12	£154,000
2012/13	£137,000 (projected)

The figures provided are net of income generated from work undertaken for other Government Departments and Agencies.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, in relation to the Central Investigation Unit, to detail (i) the total value of incidents of fraud investigated; (ii) the total value of fraud cases prosecuted; and (iii) the amount of money recouped, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17658/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department publishes a Counter Fraud and Enforcement Activities Annual Report. The outcome of CIS investigations and their overall financial value are detailed in these Annual Reports. The most recent publication the 2011/2012 Counter Fraud Annual Report is available on the DARD website. www.dardni.gov.uk Previous Annual Reports are available on request.

In response to parts (i) and (ii) of your question, I have provided, at Annex A, a summary of the value of DARD incidents of fraud investigated and the value of fraud cases prosecuted over the last 5 full financial years. In response to part (iii), the CIS does not recoup money but makes recommendations on investigation outcomes for business areas to consider imposing/ applying scheme penalties or to initiate the clawback of funding.

Annex A

Year	Total Estimated Value of Incidents of Fraud Investigated	Total Value of Fraud Cases Prosecuted
2011/2012	£174k	£4,113
2010/2011	£214k	nil
2009/2010	£490k	£28,365
2008/2009	£345k	nil
2007/2008	£124k	nil

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

DARD Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has employed the service of the Central Investigation Unit from within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in the last five years, (AQW 17332/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): DCAL has engaged the Services of DARD Central Investigation Unit since January 2009, through a Service Level Agreement (SLA).

Cycling and Walking

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what action her Department is taking to encourage people to increase their participation in sport and exercise through cycling and walking. (AQW 17438/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department's strategy for sport, Sport Matters, sets out a number of targets specifically designed to increase participation in sport and physical activity. To help achieve these targets, Sport NI, through its Active Communities Programme, has invested in the deployment of over 100 Active Community Coaches throughout the north who are responsible for delivering a wide range of sports and activities including cycling and walking. In addition to this, Sport NI has provided £65,892 over the last three financial years towards a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging people to increase their participation in sport and exercise through cycling and walking. Furthermore, over the period 2009/13, Sport NI invested £483,254 in Cycling Ulster/Cycling Ireland through its Investing in Performance Sport programme, an element of which seeks to increase participation.

Allied to this, the Department is the owner of the Lagan and Coalisland Towpaths which, between them, provide a total of 18.5 miles of traffic free cycling and walking. On an annual basis, around 600,000 people visit the towpath, which is a sustainable transport route for cycles, and the Lagan valley Regional Park. DCAL also manages 20 water recreation sites which provide a variety of walking and cycling facilities used extensively throughout the year by individuals, walking groups and cyclists. In addition, DCAL facilitates numerous charity events and community activities involving walking and cycling at these sites.

Boat Patrols

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 15519/11-15, to detail the dates and times when the seven boat patrols took place. (AQW 17496/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Details of the dates and length of the seven boat patrols as specified in AQW 15519/11-15 are outlined below.

- 20th Feb - 8 hrs
- 21st Feb - 8 hrs
- 23rd Feb - 8hrs
- 31st May - 6 hrs
- 19th June - 8 hrs
- 23rd June - 10 hrs
- 14th August – 8 hrs

Boat Patrols

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 15519/11-15, to detail the ownership of each boat used in the seven patrols. (AQW 17497/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Only one vessel was used in the seven boat patrols undertaken by the Department as outlined in AQW 15519/11-15.

The vessel was the Dun an Salar owned and operated by DCAL.

Arts and Crafts Co-operative

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding or support that may be available to people or groups who wish to establish a cooperative for arts and crafts. (AQW 17526/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Funding or support may be available to people or groups who wish to establish a cooperative for arts and crafts through the Arts Council. It can provide financial support to formally constituted organisations under its Small Grants or Lottery Project Funding programmes as well as advice and guidance in relation to suitable funding to potential applicants.

The Creative Industries Innovation Fund which is administered by the Arts Council provides support to creative businesses to develop commercially viable content, products, services and experiences capable of competing in global markets. A key priority is collaboration between businesses to encourage knowledge exchange and new market opportunities to enhance the wider impact of the creative industries across the economy.

Craft NI offer a range of information, training and exhibition opportunities for designer makers.

World Police and Fire Games 2013

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline the funding for local communities in South Down to (i) adequately prepare for; and (ii) gain long term benefit from the upcoming World Police and Fire Games 2013.
(AQW 17527/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There is no direct funding being provided by the World Police and Fire Games to local communities in South Down or in any other constituency.

There are however, a range of other activities which will be of benefit to communities where WPFG events are taking place. Local hoteliers and accommodation providers will benefit from the influx of athletes and visitors associated with the Games.

In the case of South Down the mountain bike events will take place in Kilbroney Park, Rostrevor and around 200 competitors might be expected to take part. This will also mean increased business for local cafes and restaurants etc.

WPFG are in contact with Newry and Mourne Council discussing how the Games can be promoted in the area and how those visiting the Games can be encouraged to visit South Down, return in the future and recommend to others the north of Ireland as a holiday destination.

Gymnastics: Active Communities Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail how many gymnastics coaches have been supported financially through the Active Communities Sports Fund, or any other departmental funded initiative, in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17535/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI's Lottery funded Active Communities Programme commenced on 1 April 2010. Since that date, no gymnastics coaches have been supported financially through the programme.

The Active Communities funding is allocated via eleven consortia of district councils. Responsibility for identifying priority sports and activities to be delivered under the programme rests wholly with each consortium.

During 2009/10, one gymnastics coach was supported through Sport NI's Practitioner Development Programme.

Gymnastics: Financial Support

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what financial support has been given to gymnastics in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17538/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Over the last five financial years, Sport NI has provided £561,330 exchequer and lottery funding towards the development of gymnastics in the north of Ireland. This funding can be broken down as follows: -

Financial Year	Exchequer	Lottery	Total Funding
2007/08	£57,523	£6,000	£63,523
2008/09	£104,635		£104,635
2009/10	£123,369	£11,675	£135,044
2010/11	£118,936		£118,936
2011/12	£139,192		£139,192
Grand Total			£561,330

In addition to this, Sport NI also provided £5,000 in 2010/11 and £63,756 in 2011/12, towards the Pre Games Training Camps (delivery and events); and, to assist Gymnastics NI to attract visiting Olympic and Paralympic teams to the north.

Irish Language: Funding

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 14990/11-15, to details the amount of funding allocated by her Department to the listed organisations over the last 12 months.

(AQW 17550/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pursuant to AQW 14990/11-15, the amount of funding allocated to the listed organisations, over the last 12 months, by my Department (through Foras na Gaeilge) is detailed in the table below.

Organisation	Funding (2012/13)
Summer Camps Scheme 2012	£3,500
Youth Events Scheme 2012 (Bunscoil Ard Naomh Caitriona comes under this scheme)	£5096
18th William Kennedy Piping Festival	£4,000
Caidre Teo (This is part of Scéim Phobail Gaeilge 2011-2013).	£55,354
Armagh Pipers – Secondary School Day	£3,620
The Armagh Rhymers Educational & Cultural Organisation	£7,000
Patrún an Oirghialla (Gaeltacht Oirdheiscirt Uladh)	£1000
Total	£79,570

Foras na Gaeilge have advised that the funding allocated to Gael-Linn is not in its entirety for Armagh City. Gael Linn have an office in Armagh in which two members of staff are based however those staff work across the north and similarly events that are organised to promote the Irish Language are organised across the north.

Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how she plans to ensure that Target PLS2 of the Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries strategy is realised, to ensure that 85 percent of households are within two miles of a library service. (AQW 17566/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I require Libraries NI to operate within the standards set out in the 'Delivering Tomorrow's Libraries' strategy, including Public Library Standard 2 (PLS2).

This Standard is being examined as part of the Review of Delivering Tomorrows Libraries. The ongoing consultation by Libraries NI on the Review of mobile library provision, which ends on 14th December, will also be taken into account.

Libraries NI works to meet this target through the provision of 96 Branch libraries and 28 mobile libraries (with over 700 stops) across the north of Ireland.

Research is currently being carried out by Land and Property Services (LPS) to ascertain the extent to which this Standard is being met. I will provide the result of this analysis to the member when it becomes available.

World Police and Fire Games 2013: Participation

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many participants have been registered for the World Police and Fire Games 2013. (AQW 17572/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Online registration for the 2013 World Police and Fire Games opened on 1 November 2012. As of 6 December 2012, 1268 athletes had registered to participate in the 2013 Games.

Kilcoo GAA Club

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail any funding her Department has provided to Kilcoo GAA Club and for her assessment of the alleged racism that occurred involving Kilcoo GAA Club and Crossmaglen Rangers GAA Club. (AQW 17627/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI awarded £245,000 exchequer funding to Kilcoo GAC on 29 April 2009. This funding was awarded under the Building Sport Programme for a full size GAA natural grass pitch with floodlights and extension to the existing pitch.

I am aware of the allegations of racist abuse that occurred during the Ulster Club Football Final between Kilcoo GAC and Crossmaglen Rangers GAC. There is no place for racism in our society or at any sporting event, it is utterly abhorrent and I totally condemn it.

This is, however, a matter in the first instance, for the GAA to deal with and I understand that the Ulster Council are to undertake an investigation into the incident. Furthermore, the GAA intend to discuss racism and how to deal with it at its annual congress next March. I welcome this development and am confident that the GAA will take appropriate action. In the meantime, and until investigations are completed, it would be inappropriate for me to comment further.

Department of Education

Preschool Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education what steps he has put in place to prevent a recurrence of the difficulties experienced by parents attempting to gain a pre-school place for their child.

(AQW 17028/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Programme for Government commits my Department to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Of the 23,134 applications received from parents of target age children for 2012/13 pre-school places, 22,537 resulted in the offer of a funded place. Of the remaining applications:

- 24 were from parents who engaged fully with the process, but whose children remained unplaced at its conclusion;
- 31 were from parents who submitted late applications;
- 542 were from parents who chose not to engage fully with the admissions process by expressing further preferences when invited to do so.

I have increased the budget (4.13% higher than in 2012/13) available for the pre-school programme and my Department has liaised with Education and Library Boards (ELBs) so they can secure the estimated number of funded places required.

The pre-school admissions process is preference based, and until parents express their preferences for pre-school settings it is impossible to predict with certainty where pressures will arise.

My officials will continue to work closely with the ELBs to respond to the demand for funded places in each area.

Preschool Places

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education in which areas, of each Education and Library Board, it is expected that there will be pressure on pre-school places in 2012/13.

(AQW 17029/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Programme for Government commits my Department to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Of the 23,134 applications received from parents of target age children for 2012/13 pre-school places, 22,537 resulted in the offer of a funded place. Of the remaining applications:

- 24 were from parents who engaged fully with the process, but whose children remained unplaced at its conclusion;
- 31 were from parents who submitted late applications;
- 542 were from parents who chose not to engage fully with the admissions process by expressing further preferences when invited to do so.

I have increased the budget (4.13% higher than in 2012/13) available for the pre-school programme and my Department has liaised with Education and Library Boards (ELBs) so they can secure the estimated number of funded places required.

The pre-school admissions process is preference based, and until parents express their preferences for pre-school settings it is impossible to predict with certainty where pressures will arise.

My officials will continue to work closely with the ELBs to respond to the demand for funded places in each area.

Irish Language: Education and Library Board Funding

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Education how much funding each Education and Library Board received for Irish Medium Projects in each of the last three years; and how much of this funding was allocated to schools.

(AQW 17192/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Funding received by each Education and Library Board for Irish Medium Projects in each of the last three years, and how much of this funding was allocated to schools, is set out in the table below.

£'000

	2009-10		2010-11		2011-12	
	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools
BELB	23	-	184	144	156	92
NEELB	20	-	5	-	8	-

	2009-10		2010-11		2011-12	
	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools	Total funding to ELB	Amount of this funding allocated to Schools
SEELB	41	11	36	16	63	49
SELB	20	-	74	54	24	-
WELB	41	21	63	43	125	105
Totals	145	32	362	257	376	246

Notes:

- 1 This funding relates to specific Irish Medium Projects only and does not include standard funding available to Irish Medium schools/units etc.
- 2 The funding to ELBs includes funding made available to the youth sector.
- 3 Funding is listed as allocated to schools when participants of courses run were school based, i.e. teachers, students etc.

Languages: Schoolchildren

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to list the first language of (i) primary; and (ii) post-primary school pupils for Northern Ireland as a whole, broken down by (a) percentage; and (b) totals.

(AQW 17194/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Home language of pupils in primary and post-primary schools, 2011/12

Home language	Primary schools		Post-primary schools		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Afrikaans	19	0.0	10	0.0	29	0.0
Akan/Twi-Fante	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Albanian/Shqip	36	0.0	7	0.0	43	0.0
Arabic	153	0.1	97	0.1	250	0.1
Belarusian	-	0.0	*	*	*	*
Bengali/Bangla/Sylheti	87	0.1	48	0.0	135	0.0
Edo/Bini	#	#	*	*	19	0.0
British Sign Language	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bulgarian	42	0.0	26	0.0	68	0.0
Chinese (Any Other)	86	0.1	35	0.0	121	0.0
Chinese (Cantonese)	232	0.1	339	0.2	571	0.2
Chinese (Hokkien/ Fujianese)	-	0.0	*	*	*	*
Chinese (Mandarin/ Putonghua)	153	0.1	66	0.0	219	0.1
Creole English	15	0.0	-	0.0	15	0.0
Creole French	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Czech	46	0.0	22	0.0	68	0.0
Danish	*	*	*	*	*	*
Dutch/Flemish	26	0.0	11	0.0	37	0.0
English	156,984	95.3	142,016	96.8	299,000	96.0
Estonian	*	*	*	*	*	*

Home language	Primary schools		Post-primary schools		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Fijian	#	#	*	0.0	19	0.0
Finnish	5	0.0	*	*	6	0.0
French	70	0.0	28	0.0	98	0.0
German	52	0.0	26	0.0	78	0.0
Irish	352	0.2	634	0.4	986	0.3
Greek	11	0.0	5	0.0	16	0.0
Gujarati	#	#	*	*	16	0.0
Hebrew	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hindi	132	0.1	50	0.0	182	0.1
Hungarian	115	0.1	68	0.0	183	0.1
Igbo	7	0.0	7	0.0	14	0.0
Icelandic	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Italian	34	0.0	21	0.0	55	0.0
Japanese	9	0.0	-	0.0	9	0.0
Kannada	7	0.0	-	0.0	7	0.0
Korean	15	0.0	7	0.0	22	0.0
Kurdish	#	#	*	*	7	0.0
Latvian	245	0.1	114	0.1	359	0.1
Lingala	-	0.0	*	*	*	*
Lithuanian	1,028	0.6	536	0.4	1,564	0.5
Luganda/Ganda	*	*	*	*	*	*
Macedonian	*	*	*	*	*	*
Malayalam	405	0.2	113	0.1	518	0.2
Marathi	#	#	*	*	17	0.0
Malay/Indonesian	46	0.0	16	0.0	62	0.0
Maltese	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Nepali	10	0.0	15	0.0	25	0.0
Norwegian	-	0.0	*	*	*	*
Oriya	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Other Language*	138	0.1	50	0.0	188	0.1
Pashto/Pakhto	20	0.0	10	0.0	30	0.0
Pahari/Himachali (India)	#	#	*	*	18	0.0
Panjabi	55	0.0	49	0.0	104	0.0
Polish	2,256	1.4	1,231	0.8	3,487	1.1
Portuguese	469	0.3	286	0.2	755	0.2
Persian/Farsi	14	0.0	16	0.0	30	0.0
Rajasthani/Marwari	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Romany	20	0.0	8	0.0	28	0.0
Romanian	124	0.1	50	0.0	174	0.1
Russian	144	0.1	53	0.0	197	0.1

Home language	Primary schools		Post-primary schools		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian	*	*	*	*	5	0.0
Sinhala/Sinhalese	#	#	*	*	10	0.0
Slovak	188	0.1	106	0.1	294	0.1
Slovenian	-	0.0	*	*	*	*
Shona	21	0.0	16	0.0	37	0.0
Somali	#	#	*	*	28	0.0
Spanish	69	0.0	44	0.0	113	0.0
Swahili/Kiswahili	12	0.0	8	0.0	20	0.0
Swedish	#	#	*	*	10	0.0
Tamil	43	0.0	14	0.0	57	0.0
Telugu	#	#	*	*	41	0.0
Tetum	79	0.0	17	0.0	96	0.0
Tagalog/Filipino	345	0.2	305	0.2	650	0.2
Thai	40	0.0	28	0.0	68	0.0
Tswana/Setswana	*	*	*	*	5	0.0
Tsonga	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Turkish	13	0.0	10	0.0	23	0.0
Ukrainian	8	0.0	5	0.0	13	0.0
Urdu	106	0.1	67	0.0	173	0.1
Vietnamese	*	*	*	*	7	0.0
Xhosa	#	#	*	*	8	0.0
Yiddish	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Yoruba	20	0.0	10	0.0	30	0.0
Zulu	*	*	-	0.0	*	*
Total pupils	164,812	100.0	146,747	100.0	311,559	100.0

Source: school census.

Note:

- 1 Figures for primary schools include children in nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.
- 2 Pupils classified as Newcomer are a subset of this group. A newcomer pupil is one who has enrolled in a school but who does not have the satisfactory language skills to participate fully in the school curriculum, and the wider environment, and does not have a language in common with the teacher, whether that is English or Irish. This has previously been referred to as English an Additional Language. It does not refer to indigenous pupils who choose to attend an Irish medium school.

** relates to fewer than 5 cases.

means a figure relating to 5 or more cases has been treated to prevent disclosure of a small number elsewhere.

Procurement: Regional Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education for an update, including the financial costs, on the development of a regional procurement service for the education service.

(AQW 17238/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were reaccredited with Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) status for supplies and services procurement in 2006. The ELBs have been permitted to retain their CoPE status until the establishment of ESA.

Departmental officials have developed proposals for the future delivery of procurement services for the education sector, which will be taken forward in the context of the wider ESA implementation programme. I hope to advise the Committee of the outcomes of this work in the near future.

Total project costs to date, excluding Departmental salary costs, are £1,980.

Procurement: Accreditation

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education when the Education and Library Boards' Centre of Procurement Expertise accreditation was renewed.

(AQW 17239/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) were reaccredited with Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE) status for supplies and services procurement in 2006. The ELBs have been permitted to retain their CoPE status until the establishment of ESA.

Departmental officials have developed proposals for the future delivery of procurement services for the education sector, which will be taken forward in the context of the wider ESA implementation programme. I hope to advise the Committee of the outcomes of this work in the near future.

Total project costs to date, excluding Departmental salary costs, are £1,980.

Absenteeism: Lagan Valley

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education to outline the levels of absenteeism in (i) controlled; (ii) maintained; and (iii) integrated schools at (a) primary; and (b) post-primary level in the Lagan Valley area during the last three years.

(AQW 17283/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is outlined in the tables below.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Overall absence rates (% of total half day sessions) for primary schools in the Lagan Valley area by management type of school

Management Type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Controlled (not including integrated)	4.4	4.6	4.6
Maintained	5.0	5.0	5.2
Controlled integrated	7.9	8.4	8.8
Grant Maintained Integrated	3.7	4.6	4.2
Voluntary	2.8	2.7	2.7
Total	4.6	4.7	4.7

POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Overall absence rates (% of total half day sessions) for post-primary schools in the Lagan Valley area by management type of school

Management Type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Controlled (not including integrated)	9.9	9.9	9.1
Maintained	9.6	8.7	8.3
Controlled integrated	10.1	10.2	9.3
Grant Maintained Integrated	N/A	N/A	N/A
Voluntary	4.4	4.1	3.3
Total	8.1	8.0	7.2

Notes:

- Maintained includes Catholic and other maintained schools.
- Figures for primary schools include Years 1-7 and for post-primary schools include Years 8-12.
- The figures are based on schools in the Lagan Valley parliamentary constituency only. It should be noted that there are a small number of schools in some categories when broken down by management type.
- Attendance is recorded for every pupil in half day sessions – morning and afternoon.
- N/A = Not applicable. There are no schools of this management type in the Lagan Valley parliamentary constituency.

Education and Training Inspectorate

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to have Inspectors in the Education and Training Inspectorate return to the classroom and to school management teams on a regular basis to update their knowledge and skills. (AQW 17358/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I would like to refute the idea that the Inspectorate is lacking in knowledge and skills. Inspectors are in classrooms and other training and education settings almost every day they open and as a result they are up to date with and apprised of what constitutes effective learning and teaching and exemplary practice, both within the classroom and within the structure of leadership and management.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect his Department. (AQW 17363/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received, in accordance with the Better Payment Practice Code. Unless otherwise stated in the contract, payment is due within 30 days of receipt of the goods or services, or presentation of a valid invoice or similar demand, whichever is later.

In addition, my Department is bound by payment terms as set out in the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (interest) Act 1998 as amended and supplemented by the Late Payments of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002. The Acts already enable one party to claim interest against another party for invoices that are unpaid beyond the contractually agreed payment terms.

For this current financial year to date, prompt payment performance for payment of all non-disputed invoices within 30 days currently averages 99%. Therefore it is expected that the late payment directive will have a minimal affect on my Department.

Early Years Education

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education how his Department has sought to prioritise Early Years education, including reprioritising budgets. (AQW 17397/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Despite economic pressures on the education budget, I have increased investment in early years education which now amounts to over £84m. This is a non-compulsory phase of education but in recognition of its importance there is a Programme for Government (PfG) commitment to make a pre-school place available for every child whose parents wish it. I have also recently launched 'Learning To Learn – A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning', which sets early years education in the context of overall education priorities.

I will continue to invest and re-profile existing resources to focus on raising standards and narrowing the gap in performance through high quality early years services which make the early education and learning needs of all children the key focus of provision.

Special Educational Needs: Classroom Assistants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether consideration has been given to maintaining a pool of classroom assistants within each Education and Library Board area to reduce the delay between a child receiving a statement and the recruitment of a classroom assistant to provide the necessary support. (AQW 17462/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards (ELBs) do not currently maintain a pool of Classroom Assistants.

The ELBs have previously considered central management of Classroom Assistants. However, this was found to be unsatisfactory as the high turnover of assistants resulted in the list becoming quickly out of date and some schools did not make use of the pool lists. An electronic system similar to the Substitute Teacher Register was also considered desirable but rejected due to governance difficulties.

The position may be reviewed following the SEN Review and transition to ESA.

Diabetes: Classroom Assistants

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department or the Education and Library Boards keep a record of classroom assistants who are trained to support pupils with Type 1 diabetes. (AQW 17463/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education does not keep a record of classroom assistants who are trained to support pupils with Type 1 diabetes.

Each Education and Library Board holds a database of those employed in mainstream schools and funded by the Boards to provide Special Educational Needs (SEN) adult assistance and the Board will be aware of those classroom assistants who have been trained to work with pupils with type 1 diabetes for whom the Board currently maintains a statement of SEN.

However, the majority of pupils with this condition are supported in schools and do not have a SEN statement or consequently a classroom assistant. The Board would not have details of the staff trained to deal with these pupils: these staff may be teachers, assistants or other personnel based within the school.

In cases where pupils have medical needs the board will instruct the Principal/Board of Governors to ensure that specialist training is sought prior to the assistant undertaking any medical interventions specific to the child being supported.

The local Health and Social Care Trust provides training to the relevant school staff in line with a pupil's Individual Health Care Plan. Sometimes there are delays in training due to pressures faced by the Health Trust. The training for medical needs is normally child specific and the skills developed by the adult assistance are unlikely to be transferrable.

School Curriculum: Sexual Orientation

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether teaching school children about sexual orientation in an age appropriate manner is included in the school curriculum at either primary or post-primary level.

(AQW 17531/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The teaching of Relationships and Sexual Education (RSE) is an important element within the Personal Development And Mutual Understanding (in primary schools) and the Learning for Life and Work (in post-primary) areas of learning in the revised curriculum. Through RSE, the curriculum contains sufficient scope to deal with sexual orientation.

All schools should have a Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy, setting out how the school will address RSE within each pupil's curriculum. Schools should consult on the content of the policy with pupils and parents and it should be endorsed by their Board of Governors. Whole school planning is vital to ensure RSE is taught appropriately within a meaningful context.

Schools teach within this framework and the Department of Education has made them aware of guidance produced by the Equality Commission on Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination. The guidance relates to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 and schools should take account of the Equality Commission's guidance in developing or reviewing their RSE policy.

Schools: Second Language

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education whether he has any plans to promote further the importance of a second language in schools to combat the decline in the number of pupils studying French.

(AQW 17567/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I very much recognise the importance of language learning both socially and economically. Learning a second language can help our young people to become creative, confident and articulate individuals, able to play their full part in our increasingly diverse society and to achieve to their full potential.

Modern languages are a statutory requirement at KS3 and a qualification choice at KS4 and Sixth form. Schools are encouraged to offer a wider range of modern languages and the recently introduced revised curriculum offers schools more flexibility in the choices of subjects they can offer to meet the needs of their pupils. Schools are now able to choose from any of the languages of the 27 EU member states, including French, to meet the requirements of the statutory curriculum, and can also add any other additional languages as they wish.

At Key Stage 4 the Entitlement Framework legislation will require schools to ensure that they offer pupils access to at least one course in a modern language, which will provide more pupils with the opportunity to choose to continue with languages at this key stage and post-16.

I have recently received a copy of the report 'Languages for the Future – NI Languages Strategy', which has been prepared by the joint University of Ulster-Queen's University Belfast, Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies, and which considers language learning at all levels and across a broad spectrum of activity. I will study the report and will be looking carefully, within the resources available to me, at how best to move forward on those recommendations that are focused on the teaching and learning of modern languages in schools.

Flexi-schooling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of flexi-schooling.

(AQW 17576/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not undertaken an assessment of flexi-schooling and has no plans to do so.

School Maintenance: Lagan Valley

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education for an update on the programme of planned school maintenance across the Lagan Valley constituency; and how the backlogs are being addressed.

(AQW 17577/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The maintenance of schools in the maintained and controlled sectors in the Lagan Valley constituency is the responsibility of the South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) and Southern Education and Library Board (SELB). I am advised by these Boards that the planned maintenance programme in the Lagan Valley constituency is as follows:

School Name	Estimated Value of Planned Maintenance Works 2012/13
Pond Park Nursery School	£4,244.00
Holy Trinity Nursery School	£4,000.00
Ballymacash Primary School	£263,765.00
Brownlee Primary School	£18,750.00
Carr Primary School	£12,281.00
Dunmurry Primary School	£19,875.00
Harmony Hill Primary School	£63,250.00
Killowen Primary School	£55,201.00
Largymore Primary School	£12,113.00
Lisburn Central Primary School	£30,000.00
Maghaberry Primary School	£12,739.00
Old Warren Primary School	£131,843.00
Tonagh Primary School	£2,575.00
St Aloysius Primary School	£7,727.00
St Joseph's Primary School, Lisburn	£11,323.00
Laurelhill Community College	£5,473.00
Lisnagarvey High School	£280,000.00
St Patrick's High School	£79,896.00
Fort Hill College	£361,587.00
Dromore Central Primary School	£4,000.00
Fairhill Primary School	£4,000.00
St Colman's Primary School, Dromore	£18,000.00
St Michael's Primary School, Finnis	£13,000.00
Dromore High School	£72,000.00
Total	£1,487,642.00

Backlog maintenance figures are derived from condition surveys carried out in five year cycles. The surveys identify the condition and associated make good costs of each item assessed, if appropriate. In addition, they identify the priority of the required work and in some cases a date where failure of the item is likely to occur, if remedial action is not taken. This data is an integral part of the planning process that identifies planned maintenance programmes of work.

Voluntary Grammar schools and Grant-maintained Integrated schools are entirely responsible for maintaining their own premises and have discretion to decide on the amount within their LMS budget which should be spent on maintenance. Accordingly, the Department of Education (DE) does not hold information on the programme of planned maintenance for these sectors.

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education what evidence was collected for the validity audit of the Northern Ireland Literacy and Numeracy tests.

(AQW 17578/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not clear what is meant by the term "validity audit". The following answer includes information provided by CCEA on the process by which evaluation feedback was gathered from the trials of the assessments and the validity checks that were carried out.

In advance of implementing the new computer-based assessments, CCEA worked in conjunction with both suppliers to trial and then carry out final quality assurance checks on the new assessment systems.

The trial of the new computer-based assessments took place in March 2012 with a representative sample of primary schools to robustly test the new assessments. All participating teachers and pupils were asked to provide their feedback on both assessments via a questionnaire.

NILA was trialled in 185 primary schools and completed by 11,000 pupils. A total of 246 teachers and 7,968 pupils provided feedback on this literacy assessment.

NINA was trialled in 193 primary schools and completed by 13,000 pupils. A total of 244 teachers and 9,424 pupils provided feedback on this numeracy assessment.

Throughout both trials CCEA's CBA helpdesk was available as a support to schools. Only a small number of calls were received during both trials, and no calls were logged regarding technical difficulties.

50 primary schools participated in CCEA's final quality assurance checks of NILA and NINA in May 2012. 2,520 pupils completed the new computer-based assessments.

A total of 51 teachers and 1,621 pupils provided feedback on the literacy assessment.

52 teachers and 1,699 pupils provided feedback on the numeracy assessment.

In addition to the evaluation reports, both suppliers provided detailed reports following both the trial and final quality assurance checks. These reports outlined the supplier's findings to both stages of testing, and provided detailed statistical analysis on the validity of assessment items.

In advance of the implementation of the new computer-based assessments validity checks were also undertaken by CCEA on both assessments.

Throughout the development and trialling of both assessment systems, content validity was kept under review to ensure each respective assessment was relevant and fit for purpose. Both assessment systems were quality assured by CCEA and practising literacy and numeracy experts.

Construct validity of both assessments was also measured during the March trial and May quality assurance process. Assurance on validity has also been obtained through consultation with stakeholders. Subsequent to the May quality assurance process, both assessment providers met with a sample of teachers from 20 schools to discuss the alignment of pupil outcomes with teacher's professional judgement

Literacy and Numeracy: Assessments

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education for the results of the validity audit of the Northern Ireland Literacy and Numeracy tests.

(AQW 17579/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not clear what is meant by the term "validity audit". The following answer includes information provided by CCEA on the process by which evaluation feedback was gathered from the trials of the assessments and the validity checks that were carried out.

In advance of implementing the new computer-based assessments, CCEA worked in conjunction with both suppliers to trial and then carry out final quality assurance checks on the new assessment systems.

The trial of the new computer-based assessments took place in March 2012 with a representative sample of primary schools to test the new assessments in terms of:

- compatibility with the C2k platform;
- assessment content;
- pupil interaction and engagement;
- potential difficulties/challenges schools may encounter; and
- to enable both assessments to test their items and algorithms.

The key objectives to the quality assurance process in May was to:

- check the degree to which developments informed by previous stages of testing and trialling were successful;
- trial both assessments' administration processes;
- obtain feedback on reports produced from both assessments; and
- collect feedback on the overall assessment process similar to the experience which schools will encounter in the 2012 autumn term.

Only a small number of calls to the CCEA CBA helpdesk facility were received during both trials, and no calls were logged regarding technical difficulties.

Subsequent to considering the findings from the trials and testing undertaken above, CCEA completed stewardship sign offs for both assessments at the end of August.

Outcomes from the March trial and May quality assurance process also enabled both assessment suppliers to undertake item level analysis, test their algorithms, assess the length of the assessments and analyse assessment outcomes in terms

of normal distribution, year group and criterion. Outcomes from both stages of testing also informed improvements required to the layout and functionality of assessments, ensuring that the assessments focused on content and not the techniques required to answer items.

Findings from the evaluation of the May quality assurance process indicated that just over four fifths of teachers rated the reports from both assessment systems as useful. Virtually all teachers who did not rate these reports as useful indicated that they had not had an opportunity to view the reports. Furthermore, subsequent to the May quality assurance, both assessment providers met with a sample of teachers from 20 schools to discuss the alignment of pupil outcomes with teacher's professional judgement. Outcomes from this exercise revealed that the outcomes from both the literacy and numeracy assessment were generally in line with teacher expectation. Nevertheless, findings were taken on board by both suppliers.

Teachers and Managers: Inspections

Mr Craig asked the Minister of Education how underperforming teachers or managers are dealt with through the inspection process.

(AQW 17580/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The work of a teacher, principal or vice principal, may be evaluated as 'unsatisfactory' and hence underperforming, as part of a school inspection carried out by ETI.

The ETI will comment only on the teacher or principal's work as observed during an inspection and indicate the strengths and areas for improvement.

Where a teacher's or principal's work is evaluated as unsatisfactory the Board of Governors is required to provide a programme of support in consultation with the employing authority.

All of the above is carried out in line with the procedures drawn up jointly by teachers' employing authorities in consultation with the Department of Education.

Together Towards Improvement

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education how effective the implementation of the self evaluation approaches outlined in the Education and Training Inspectorate document Together Towards Improvement has been in schools.

(AQW 17590/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: 'Together Towards Improvement' (TTI) was introduced in 2003 and revised, to take account of feedback from stakeholders, and re-launched in 2010.

TTI is a resource for schools to use at any time, not just 'in preparation for an inspection'.

Whilst the quality indicators are provided to help schools self-evaluate the quality of the educational provision, the ETI evaluates self-evaluation in the round, not the use made of TTI.

Effective self-evaluation is a key feature of schools that are evaluated by the ETI as good or better. In fact, the increased emphasis given to self-evaluation helps in the effort to present inspection as part of a process, rather than as an event.

The recent Chief Inspectors' Report highlights that:

- the school development planning process is effective in 75% of the primary schools inspected; however,
- of all of the measures evaluated by inspectors in post-primary schools, the least effective is 'actions to promote improvement', which includes school development planning and self-evaluation, neither of which is good enough in nearly one-half of our schools.

Capital Budget and Out-turn

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's initial capital allocation; and the outturn expenditure in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 17591/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department's opening capital budget and capital outturn expenditure in each of the last ten years was as follows:

Financial Year	Opening Capital Budget £000s	Capital Outturn Expenditure £000s
2002/03	109,284	128,850
2003/04	152,331	145,407
2004/05	201,734	149,608
2005/06	211,649	126,032
2006/07	213,461	132,512

Financial Year	Opening Capital Budget £000s	Capital Outturn Expenditure £000s
2007/08	279,754	157,189
2008/09	214,600	198,899
2009/10	253,300	242,138
2010/11	169,308	186,793
2011/12	114,710	114,100

Primary Schools: Extra-curricular Activities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what level of funding has been provided for primary schools to access extra-curricular activities outside normal school hours, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17598/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Extended Schools (ES) programme provides additional funding to those schools serving areas of the highest social disadvantage, enabling them to provide for a range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day which have a clear focus on improving educational outcomes and removing barriers to learning.

The total amount of Extended Schools resources allocated to primary schools in each of the 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years is outlined in Table 1 below.

The primary schools within the North Down constituency eligible to receive ES funding and the total amount allocated in respect of those schools in each of the 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 1

Primary Schools ES allocations	2010/11 £s	2011/12 £s	2012/13 £s
	6,544,566	6,463,155	7,471,089

Table 2

DENI Ref No.	Primary Schools in North Down Constituency in receipt of ES funding	2010/11 ES Allocation	2011/12 ES Allocation	2012/13 ES Allocation
4011670	Clandeboyne PS, Bangor	Did not qualify	£17,710	£21,677
4011681	Millisle PS	£17,840	£21,160	£23,920
4011688	Redburn PS, Holywood (closed 31st August 2012)	Did not qualify	£10,600	£2,400
4013023	Bloomfield PS	Did not qualify	£29,498	£34,613
4016002	Kilcooley PS, Bangor	£17,710	£18,745	£21,287
4036148	St Malachy's PS, Bangor	Did Not Qualify	£29,440	£33,800

Primary Schools: Extra-curricular Activities

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how much departmental money has been spent to help primary schools in North Down to access extra-curricular activities outside normal school hours, in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17599/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Extended Schools (ES) programme provides additional funding to those schools serving areas of the highest social disadvantage, enabling them to provide for a range of services and activities outside of the traditional school day which have a clear focus on improving educational outcomes and removing barriers to learning.

The total amount of Extended Schools resources allocated to primary schools in each of the 2010/11, 2011/12 and 2012/13 financial years is outlined in Table 1 below.

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4036148	St Malachy's PS, Bangor	Did Not Qualify	£29,440	£33,800

Religious Education: Support

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to what support is currently offered to teachers of religious education, and how this compares to (i) five years ago; (ii) ten years ago; and (iii) twenty years ago.

(AQW 17697/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Religious Education (RE) is a compulsory part of the revised curriculum from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 4. Legislation provides that the Department sets a Core Syllabus for RE to be delivered in schools.

The RE Core Syllabus was revised in 2006 and came into operation on a phased basis from August 2007 to June 2010 in line with the implementation of the revised curriculum. Following the review of the Core Syllabus an RE Advisory Group was established and over the past 5 years the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has been working with the RE Advisory Group to support teachers and schools in the delivery of RE by developing guidance and support materials for teachers, including specific materials on world religions for new areas of the Core Syllabus at Key Stage 3, and to raise the awareness of RE by mapping the Learning Objectives across the curriculum as a whole. Currently CCEA and the RE Advisory Group are preparing non-statutory guidance for RE at Primary to sit alongside the Core Syllabus. This is intended to provide teachers with guidance in RE which is more directly related to the language and methodologies of the curriculum.

Schools/teachers are also supported in the delivery of RE by the Education and Library Boards' RE Advisors who as well as producing guidance materials for teachers also provide additional support for schools on request. The Catholic maintained sector retain Diocesan Advisers for RE and also provides comprehensive support through their Alive 'O' and Fully Alive Curriculum Programme.

The Department does not hold specific information on the level of support provided to schools over the past 30 years however, during this period schools/teachers have been continually supported by the Education and Library Boards' RE Advisors in the delivery of RE.

Schools and Associated Property: Transfer

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail, by year, the organisations and individuals which have transferred schools, and associated property, to the responsibility of his Department since 1921 and which of these retain rights of nomination to Boards of Governors.

(AQW 17698/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold a list of the organisations and individuals which have transferred schools, and associated property, to the responsibility of the Department since 1921, and to produce such a list would be at disproportionate cost.

It should be noted that all transferors retain the right to nominate governors to transferred schools.

Primary Schools: Class Sizes

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education which primary schools, in each Education and Library Board, have classes with thirty or more children.

(AQW 17699/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, it is a matter for school Boards of Governors and Principals to plan and use resources to maximum effect in accordance with their own needs and priorities, including setting staffing levels.

However, legislation does dictate that classes for our youngest children, Years 1-4, should be kept at 30 or fewer. Approval for a class size in excess of 30 pupils must be approved by the relevant Education and Library Board (ELB) which administer this policy. Such exceptions can apply if a school has to comply with a direction of an admissions appeal tribunal, a school attendance order or a statement of special educational needs. ELBs can also take into account the need to avoid unreasonable public expenditure.

The information requested is provided in the table below. This information relates to classes across Year groups 1-7 in primary schools and includes classes of 30 pupils, as well as classes of more than 30 pupils.

Primary schools with at least one class of 30 or more children by Education and Library Board (ELB), 2011/12

School name	ELB
Botanic Primary School	Belfast
Carr's Glen Primary School	Belfast
Cranmore Integrated Primary School	Belfast
Edenbrooke Primary School	Belfast
Finaghy Primary School	Belfast
Forth River Primary School	Belfast
Greenwood Primary School	Belfast
Harding Memorial Primary School	Belfast
Hazelwood Primary School	Belfast
Holy Child Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
Holy Cross Girls' Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
Holy Family Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
Lowwood Primary School	Belfast
Mercy Primary School	Belfast
Orangefield Primary School	Belfast
Our Lady of Lourdes Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
Rosetta Primary School	Belfast
St Anne's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Bride's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St John the Baptist Primary School, Finaghy	Belfast
St Joseph's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Malachy's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Matthew's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Michael's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Oliver Plunkett Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Paul's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Peter's Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
St Therese of Lisieux Primary School, Belfast	Belfast
Strandtown Primary School	Belfast
Stranmillis Primary School	Belfast
Victoria Park Primary School	Belfast
Anahorish Primary School	North Eastern
Antrim Primary School	North Eastern

School name	ELB
Ashgrove Primary School	North Eastern
Ballykeel Primary School	North Eastern
Ballymena Primary School	North Eastern
Ballymoney Controlled Integrated Primary School	North Eastern
Ballynure Primary School	North Eastern
Ballysally Primary School	North Eastern
Braidside Integrated Primary School	North Eastern
Broughshane Primary School	North Eastern
Buick Memorial Primary School	North Eastern
Camphill Primary School	North Eastern
Carnalridge Primary School	North Eastern
Carniny Primary School	North Eastern
Carnmoney Primary School	North Eastern
Carrickfergus Model Primary School	North Eastern
D H Christie Memorial Primary School	North Eastern
Damhead Primary School	North Eastern
Eden Primary School	North Eastern
Garvagh Primary School	North Eastern
Glengormley Integrated Primary School	North Eastern
Gracehill Primary School	North Eastern
Greenisland Primary School	North Eastern
Greystone Primary School	North Eastern
Harpurs Hill Primary School	North Eastern
Hezlett Primary School	North Eastern
Killowen Primary School, Coleraine	North Eastern
Kilrea Primary School	North Eastern
King's Park Primary School	North Eastern
Leaney Primary School	North Eastern
Lislagan Primary School	North Eastern
Loanends Primary School	North Eastern
Macosquin Primary School	North Eastern
Millquarter Primary School	North Eastern
Moorfields Primary School	North Eastern
Mossley Primary School	North Eastern
Mount St Michael's Primary School	North Eastern
Olderfleet Primary School	North Eastern
Portrush Primary School	North Eastern
Portstewart Primary School	North Eastern
Randalstown Central Primary School	North Eastern
Round Tower Integrated Primary School	North Eastern
Spires Integrated Primary School	North Eastern

School name	ELB
St Bernard's Primary School, Newtownabbey	North Eastern
St Brigid's Primary School, Ballymena	North Eastern
St Brigid's Primary School, Knockloughrim	North Eastern
St Brigid's Primary School, Tirkane	North Eastern
St Columba's Primary School, Kilrea	North Eastern
St Colum's Primary School, Portstewart	North Eastern
St Comgall's Primary School, Antrim	North Eastern
St James' Primary School, Newtownabbey	North Eastern
St John's Primary School, Coleraine	North Eastern
St John's Primary School, Swatragh	North Eastern
St Joseph's Primary School, Crumlin	North Eastern
St Joseph's Primary School, Dunloy	North Eastern
St Joseph's Primary School, Stiles	North Eastern
St Macnissi's Primary School, Larne	North Eastern
St Macnissi's Primary School, Newtownabbey	North Eastern
St Malachy's Primary School, Coleraine	North Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Bellaghy	North Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Draperstown	North Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Portglenone	North Eastern
St Patrick's & St Brigid's Primary School, Ballycastle	North Eastern
Templepatrick Primary School	North Eastern
The Diamond Primary School	North Eastern
Victoria Primary School	North Eastern
Whiteabbey Primary School	North Eastern
Whitehead Primary School	North Eastern
Whitehouse Primary School	North Eastern
Woodburn Primary School	North Eastern
All Childrens Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Andrews Memorial Primary School	South Eastern
Ballinderry Primary School	South Eastern
Ballyholme Primary School	South Eastern
Ballymacrickett Primary School	South Eastern
Ballymagee Primary School	South Eastern
Ballynahinch Primary School	South Eastern
Bangor Central Primary School	South Eastern
Belvoir Park Primary School	South Eastern
Braniel Primary School	South Eastern
Cairnshill Primary School	South Eastern
Carrickmannon Primary School	South Eastern
Castle Gardens Primary School	South Eastern
Cedar Integrated Primary School	South Eastern

School name	ELB
Christ the Redeemer Primary School, Dunmurry	South Eastern
Clandeboye Primary School	South Eastern
Comber Primary School	South Eastern
Crawfordsburn Primary School	South Eastern
Cumran Primary School	South Eastern
Donaghadee Primary School	South Eastern
Downpatrick Primary School	South Eastern
Downshire Primary School,Hillsborough	South Eastern
Dromara Primary School	South Eastern
Dundonald Primary School	South Eastern
Fort Hill Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Gilnahirk Primary School	South Eastern
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Harmony Hill Primary School	South Eastern
Killowen Primary School, lisburn	South Eastern
Kilmaine Primary School	South Eastern
Lisnasharragh Primary School	South Eastern
Londonderry Primary School	South Eastern
Loughview Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Maghaberry Primary School	South Eastern
Meadow Bridge Primary School	South Eastern
Millennium Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Millisle Primary School	South Eastern
Moira Primary School	South Eastern
Moneyrea Primary School	South Eastern
Newtownards Model Primary School	South Eastern
Oakwood Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Our Lady and St Patrick Primary School, Downpatrick	South Eastern
Our Lady Queen of Peace Primary School, Dunmurry	South Eastern
Pond Park Primary School	South Eastern
Portavogie Primary School	South Eastern
Rathmore Primary School	South Eastern
Riverdale Primary School	South Eastern
Rowandale Integrated Primary School	South Eastern
Seymour Hill Primary School	South Eastern
St Bernard's Primary School, Belfast	South Eastern
St Brigid's Primary School, Downpatrick	South Eastern
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	South Eastern
St Ita's Primary School, Belfast	South Eastern
St Joseph's Primary School, Carryduff	South Eastern
St Joseph's Primary School, Lisburn	South Eastern

School name	ELB
St Macartan's Primary School, Loughinisland	South Eastern
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	South Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Kircubbin	South Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Newcastle	South Eastern
St Mary's Primary School, Portaferry	South Eastern
St Patrick's Primary School, Ballynahinch	South Eastern
St Patrick's Primary School, Holywood	South Eastern
St Patrick's Primary School, Portaferry	South Eastern
Sullivan Upper School Prep. Dept.	South Eastern
The Holy Family Primary School	South Eastern
Towerview Primary School	South Eastern
Abercorn Primary School	Southern
Armstrong Primary School	Southern
Ballydown Primary School	Southern
Ballyholland Primary School	Southern
Bocombra Primary School	Southern
Bridge Integrated Primary School	Southern
Bronte Primary School	Southern
Bush Primary School	Southern
Carrick Primary School, Lurgan	Southern
Carrick Primary School, Warrenpoint	Southern
Christian Brothers' Primary School, Armagh	Southern
Cloughoge Primary School	Southern
Cookstown Primary School	Southern
Derrylatinee Primary School	Southern
Donacloney Primary School	Southern
Dromintee Primary School	Southern
Drumadonnell Primary School	Southern
Edenderry Primary School	Southern
Fair Hill Primary School	Southern
Fivemiletown Primary School	Southern
Hardy Memorial Primary School	Southern
Hart Memorial Primary School	Southern
Howard Primary School	Southern
Iveagh Primary School	Southern
Kilkeel Primary School	Southern
King's Park Primary School	Southern
Maralin Village Primary School	Southern
Markethill Primary School	Southern
Millington Primary School	Southern
Moyallon Primary School	Southern

School name	ELB
Orchard County Primary School	Southern
Orritor Primary School	Southern
Our Lady's Primary School, Dungannon	Southern
Portadown Integrated Primary School	Southern
Presentation Primary School	Southern
Rich Mount Primary School	Southern
Roan St Patrick's Primary School	Southern
Saints & Scholars Int Primary School, Armagh	Southern
St Anthony's Primary School, Legahory	Southern
St Brendan's Primary School, Moyraverty	Southern
St Bronagh's Primary School, Rostrevor	Southern
St Clare's Convent Primary School, Newry	Southern
St Colman's Primary School, Banbridge	Southern
St Colman's Primary School, Kilkeel	Southern
St Dallan's Primary School, Warrenpoint	Southern
St Francis of Assisi Primary School, Keady	Southern
St Francis Primary School, Lurgan	Southern
St John's Primary School, moy	Southern
St Josephs and St James Primary School, Poyntzpass	Southern
St Joseph's Convent Primary School, newry	Southern
St Joseph's Primary School, Galbally	Southern
St Joseph's Primary School, Killeavy	Southern
St Malachy's Primary School, Armagh	Southern
St Mary's Primary School , Aughnacloy	Southern
St Mary's Primary School, Banbridge	Southern
St Mary's Primary School, Dungannon	Southern
St Mary's Primary School, Mullaghbawn	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Aghacommon	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Armagh	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Cullyhanna	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Drumgreenagh	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Hilltown	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Killyman Road, Dungannon	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Mayobridge	Southern
St Patrick's Primary School, Pomeroy Road, Dungannon	Southern
St Peter's Primary School, Cloughreagh	Southern
St Ronan's Primary School, Newry	Southern
St Teresa's Primary School, Lurgan	Southern
Tandragee Primary School	Southern
Tannaghmore Primary School	Southern
Waringstown Primary School	Southern

School name	ELB
Windmill Integrated Primary School	Southern
Ballykelly Primary School	Western
Broadbridge Primary School	Western
Drumachose Primary School	Western
Drumahoe Primary School	Western
Drumrane Primary School	Western
Eglinton Primary School	Western
Enniskillen Integrated Primary School	Western
Enniskillen Model Primary School	Western
Glendermott Primary School	Western
Good Shepherd Primary School and Nursery School, Waterside	Western
Hollybush Primary School	Western
Holy Child Primary School, Creggan	Western
Jones Memorial Primary School	Western
Kesh Primary School	Western
Lisbellaw Primary School	Western
Lisnagelvin Primary School	Western
Londonderry Model Primary School	Western
Longtower Primary School	Western
Loreto Convent Primary School	Western
Nazareth House Primary School	Western
Oakgrove Integrated Primary School	Western
Rosemount Primary School	Western
Sacred Heart Primary School, Omagh	Western
Sacred Heart Primary School, Waterside	Western
Sion Mills Primary School	Western
St Anne's Primary School, Strabane	Western
St Canice's Primary School, Dungiven	Western
St Colmcille's Primary School, Claudy	Western
St Colmcille's Primary School, Omagh	Western
St Conor's Primary School, Omagh	Western
St Dympna's Primary School, Dromore	Western
St Eugene's Primary School, Derry	Western
St Eugene's Primary School, Victoria Bridge	Western
St Lawrence's Primary School, Fintona	Western
St Mary's Girls' Primary School, Strabane	Western
St Mary's Primary School, Ballymagorry	Western
St Mary's Primary School, Claudy	Western
St Mary's Primary School, Omagh	Western
St Patrick's Primary School, Castledearg	Western
St Patrick's Primary School, Mullinaskea	Western

School name	ELB
St Paul's Primary School, Irvinestown	Western
St Ronan's Primary School, Lisnaskea	Western
Strabane Controlled Primary School	Western

Source: school census.

Classroom Assistants

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the (i) number; and (ii) percentage of classroom assistants who are (a) Protestant; and (b) Catholic in (i) integrated; (ii) Irish language; and (iii) voluntary grammar schools
(AQW 17751/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department does not hold the information requested in respect of Grant Maintained Integrated and Voluntary Grammar schools. The information below has been provided by the Education and Library Boards.

(i) Controlled Integrated schools

Protestant Community		Catholic Community		Non Determined	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
178	60.54	72	24.49	44	14.97

(ii) Irish Language schools

Protestant Community		Catholic Community		Non Determined	
Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
4	2.84	119	84.39	18	12.77

Age-weighted Pupil Unit

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the value of the Age-Weighted Pupil Unit in each of the last five years.
(AQW 17796/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Annex G of the "Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools" guidance (April 2012) sets out the details of the AWPU cash value for a financial year. This document is published on the Department's website. The table below sets out the values for the past five years.

Year	Value
2012-2013	£2,025.32
2011-2012	£2,041.01
2010-2011	£2,056.52
2009-2010	£2,020.49
2008-2009	£1,966.16

Primary Schools: Class Sizes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what consideration he has given to a cap on primary 5 to primary 7 class sizes.
(AQW 17797/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The quality of teachers and the instruction they provide is the key influence on learning outcomes. However, I am aware that there is evidence that smaller class sizes in early years learning can have a positive impact on outcomes.

In view of this, the Department requires schools to keep classes for the youngest children (years 1 to 4 in primary school) at 30 or fewer pupils. The Education and Library Boards administer this policy and are responsible for providing any additional funding to primary schools to enable the policy to be achieved.

In terms of class sizes for pupils in Year 5-7, School Boards of Governors have a degree of flexibility, afforded to them under the Local Management of Schools arrangements. The Board of Governors has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's education budget and this would include taking decisions on class sizes. This allows the schools' Boards of Governors to determine how they use their delegated funding to maximum effect in accordance with their school's specific needs and priorities.

Composite Classes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what research his Department has carried out into the effect of composite classes in (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools.

(AQW 17798/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not carried out any specific research into the effect of composite classes.

However, there is evidence from inspections carried out in schools by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) that provision for composite classes is most effective when it is supported by thoughtful planning and preparation, skilful organisation and management and as in all classes, composite or otherwise, insight into how best to cater for different stages of development.

There is no evidence from inspections to suggest that the teaching of children in composite classes is any less competent than that received by children in classes with 1 year group only.

School Boards of Governors have a degree of flexibility, afforded to them under the Local Management of Schools arrangements, and it is the Board of Governors that has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's education budget. Any decision on the use of a composite class approach is therefore a matter for the Board of Governors.

Class Sizes

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education what research his Department has carried out into the optimal class size for (i) primary schools; and (ii) post-primary schools.

(AQW 17799/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department has not carried out any research into optimal class sizes in primary or post-primary schools.

As stated in my reply to AQW 17797/11-15, it is a school's Board of Governors that has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's education budget and this would include taking decisions on class sizes.

At primary school, it is the Department's policy to keep classes for our youngest pupils, (Years 1-4), to a maximum of 30 pupils and schools can apply to their Education and Library Board, for assistance to meet this policy requirement.

At Post-Primary school, class sizes are restricted to 35, except for those subjects defined as "practical" which should be limited to 20 pupils. DE guidance does however provide some flexibility for Science, Art and Design and Physical Education. The flexibility varies dependent upon the year group of pupils. More information on this can be found in DE's circular 2004/5 which is available on the Department's website at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/class_sizes_in_practical_subjects_circular_2004_5.pdf

Shimna Intergrated College: Sharing Language and Sharing Culture Programme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to renew Shimna College's funding for the Sharing Language and Sharing Culture programme which it is delivering in primary schools.

(AQW 17846/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education has not provided any funding for the Sharing Language and Sharing Culture programme which was an initiative undertaken by the school and which is additional to the curriculum requirements. Therefore it is not a question of "renewing" funding.

Against a background of pressures on the education budget, priority must be placed on meeting existing curriculum requirements. Should primary schools consider this programme of value, they have the choice of funding this initiative from their existing budgets.

While I recognise the importance of Shared Education, I am awaiting the report from the Ministerial Advisory Group before assessing how best to advance shared education in the north of Ireland. The report is due on 1 February 2013.

Orangefield High School: Site Plans

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Education to outline his plans for the Orangefield High School campus following the planned closure of the school.

(AQO 3057/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I understand from the Belfast Education and Library Board that it intends to publish a development proposal this month to close Orangefield High School.

As you will be no doubt be aware Development Proposals are subject to a two month statutory consultation period after which I must make an assessment based on all the relevant information.

As no Development Proposal has been published and no decision taken I am not in a position at this time to comment on the future use of the Orangefield site.

The processes by which any surplus asset is disposed of are set out the guidelines drawn up by Land and Property Services. These are available on the DE website.

However, my main concern is for the pupils and staff currently served by Orangefield. Their futures will be my paramount concern if I have to make a decision about the future of Orangefield High School rather than the future of the site.

Schools: Children with Allergies

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Education what training is provided to schools to support children with allergies. (AQO 3058/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The joint Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and Department of Education document "Supporting Pupils with Medication Needs" was issued to all schools in 2008 and provides the overarching framework for meeting the medication needs of school pupils including those with allergies.

At the time of the policy being launched the Department provided £248k to the Education and Library Boards for the training of school principals on how to meet the needs of pupils with medication needs.

Training and support for school staff is available from both Health and Social Care Trusts and the Education and Library Boards to enable schools to meet the needs of children with medication needs, including those with allergies.

School principals are responsible for determining the training needs of their staff in conjunction with the School Health Service and they can avail of a wide range of training offered by boards, health bodies and other providers. Education and library boards therefore undertake an annual needs analysis of the training required by schools in the forthcoming academic year.

Education Bill: Consultation

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Education whether he will reconsider the level of consultation on the Education Bill that his Department has offered to pupils, parents and teachers. (AQO 3059/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: There was extensive public consultation during the previous Assembly mandate on the policy underpinning the Education Bill. The Education Committee is also consulting broadly at present, and the Assembly has agreed to extend Committee stage to facilitate this. In these circumstances I have no plans to reconsider consultation.

Teachers: Pension Contributions

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Education what steps he is taking to ensure the protection of lower paid teachers in relation to pension contributions. (AQO 3060/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department is currently consulting on proposed increases to contributions from April 2013 for members of the NI Teachers' Pension Scheme. The proposals contained in the consultation document will at the very least guarantee that teachers earning less than £26,000 per year will see no further increase beyond that applied in April 2012.

As I did last year, I have asked key stakeholders to consider the proposal that there should be no increase in the contribution rate for teachers earning less than £32,000 per year. I have also included a proposal that teachers earning less than £32,000 per year should revert to the 2011-12 rate of 6.4%.

The consultation period closes on 16 January 2013. I will give careful consideration to the views expressed before I make my final decision on how the April 2013 increases will be applied.

Grammar Schools: Careers Advice

Mr Clarke asked the Minister of Education what provision has been made to ensure that grammar schools provide alternative careers advice to pupils rather than placing a sole emphasis on degree programmes. (AQO 3061/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am committed to ensuring that access to high-quality, careers education, information, advice and guidance (CEIAG) is accessible for all our young people, no matter what type of school they attend. The increased choice of courses under the entitlement framework, both general and applied, brings with it a requirement for high quality CEIAG to help parents and young people in reaching decisions on pathways that match their aptitudes and aspirations. Careers management forms part of the statutory curriculum. Taught, timetabled provision of careers information includes opportunities for personal planning, cross-curricular development of employability skills and planned and relevant work-related learning. Schools have a number of tools at their disposal to support them in the development of good careers education. The Education and Training Inspectorate has developed tailored, quality standards indicators for self-evaluation, and my Department has published a map and guide to link careers across the curriculum.

My officials have recently written to all post primary schools reminding them of the commitment under the joint DE DEL careers strategy to ensure that all pupils have a clear understanding of the impact of their education, training and employment choices and to help make informed decisions. Through schools partnership working with the careers service, pupils have access to impartial advice and guidance from the careers service at key transition points.

School Closures

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what processes his Department has in place in the eventuality of a school closure to ensure that pupils are put first.

(AQW 17930/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I refer the Member to the answer to AQW 15635/11-15, tabled by Peter Weir MLA and published in the Official Report on 26 October 2010.

Department for Employment and Learning

City & Guilds 6131 Qualification

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning where fully qualified teachers in Technology and Design with a PGCE in post-primary education can obtain a City & Guilds 6131 workshop competency qualification.

(AQW 17171/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Responsibility for the qualification requirements of teachers rests with the Department of Education (DE). In order to ensure that they can safely deliver the practical aspects of the Revised Northern Ireland Schools Curriculum, DE requires that all PGCE teachers of Technology and Design in Northern Ireland schools hold the City & Guilds 6131: Workshop Competency certificate (DE Circular 2007/22, paragraph 1.6 and Annex A). The course was developed, and is the property of, the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB).

In Northern Ireland, students of the University of Ulster's PGCE in Technology and Design undertake the C&G 6131 qualification in partnership with the BELB and, in the past, the BELB has run a number of ad hoc 6131 courses on behalf of DE for teachers already in posts within the Northern Ireland School System. At the request of DE, my Department also funded the course in 2010 for 7 teachers that had qualified in Great Britain (GB). This course was an interim measure while DE officials highlighted the existence of the C&G requirement to all GB providers of PGCE Technology and Design courses and provided information on measures to fulfil this requirement.

Currently, fully qualified teachers in Technology and Design with a PGCE in post-primary education cannot obtain the City & Guilds 6131: Workshop Competency qualification. However, my officials met with Department of Education (DE) officials on 4 December 2012 and agreed that the DE will explore whether the C&G 6131 course should be offered to returning teachers as a standalone qualification and, if so, how that course should be delivered.

Engineering Graduates: Numbers

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of engineering graduates in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17477/11-15)

Dr Farry: The total number of engineering graduates from the Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in each of the last five academic years is detailed in the table overleaf.

Year	Total
2006/07	705
2007/08	700
2008/09	690
2009/10	720
2010/11	840

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 1 Figures in the table are rounded to the nearest 5.
- 2 The figures include graduates from both postgraduate and undergraduate courses.
- 3 Engineering includes all subjects within the Engineering and Technology subject area.
- 4 The latest year for which qualifications data are available is 2010/11.

Engineering Graduates: Employment

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what systems his Department has in place to track the employment destinations of all engineering graduates.

(AQW 17478/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Higher Education Statistics Agency is responsible for collecting information on the destinations of graduates from Higher Education Institutions in the United Kingdom. These are collected through the means of the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey and the data provide information on the activities of students after leaving higher education. The dataset for Northern Ireland is subsequently provided to analysts within my Department.

There are two stages to the destination survey:

- Stage 1- six months after graduating.

The first stage is a census of European Union domiciled graduates six months after they graduate. Response rates for engineering graduates from higher education institutions in Northern Ireland for Stage 1 in 2011/11 was 82%, therefore there is good coverage of engineering graduates' destinations for Northern Ireland allowing detailed analysis of the data for this group.

- Stage 2 - three and a half years after graduating.

The second stage of the survey is a follow up to Stage 1 and is carried out three and a half years after graduation. It is conducted on a sample of individuals who responded to the stage 1. The first Stage 2 survey was carried out in the winter of 2006 reporting on the 2002/03 graduates. It is currently a biennial survey. Analysis of engineering graduates may be available where sample sizes allow.

Information included within the survey focuses mainly on the type of work a graduate has entered or what sort of further study they may be engaged in where relevant. Data also include the type of industry sector and occupation type that graduates enter as well as location of employment and salary levels. Analysis of graduates can also be undertaken by students' attributes such as gender, subject of study and qualification obtained.

Engineering: Jobs

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of engineering jobs, or jobs requiring an engineering degree, which have been advertised in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17479/11-15)

Dr Farry: The table below outlines the total number of jobs within the engineering discipline advertised in each of the last five years on the Department for Employment and Learning's website JobCentre Online. The data has been extracted from the Department's Client Management System and covers the 5 year period 1 December 2008 to 4 December 2012. The Department is unable to advise regarding job opportunities advertised through other organisations, websites or newspapers.

Annex A contains a further breakdown of each discipline into occupational areas.

Annex A

Occupation/Engineering Discipline	At 1 Dec 2008	At 1 Dec 2009	At 1 Dec 2010	At 1 Dec 2011	At 1 Dec 2012	Total
Plumbing or Heating Engineer	19	10	17	13	25	84
Science and Engineering Professionals	46	67	65	84	154	416
Skilled Engineering Trades	193	156	123	149	155	776
Totals	258	233	205	246	334	1276

Annex A

	Occupation	At 1 Dec 2008	At 1 Dec 2009	At 1 Dec 2010	At 1 Dec 2011	At 1 Dec 2012
Plumbing or Heating Engineer	Pipe Fitters	8	4	12	5	15
	Plumbers, Heating and Ventilating Engineers	11	6	2	7	10
	Sheet Metal Workers	0	0	3	1	0
	Sub Totals	19	10	17	13	25

	Occupation	At 1 Dec 2008	At 1 Dec 2009	At 1 Dec 2010	At 1 Dec 2011	At 1 Dec 2012
Science and Engineering Professionals	Biological Scientists and Biochemists	0	3	5	3	2
	Chemical Engineers	0	1	1	3	1
	Chemists	0	1	0	2	3
	Civil Engineers	1	2	1	3	2
	Design and Development Engineers	2	5	7	4	12
	Electrical Engineers	8	4	9	14	44
	Electronic Engineers	0	1	0	6	6
	Engineering Professionals N.E.C.	5	11	8	17	20
	Mechanical Engineers	19	6	12	17	36
	Physicists, Geologists and Meteorologists	2	0	0	1	2
	Planning and Quality Control Engineers	4	22	8	3	3
	Production and Process Engineers	4	3	2	7	5
	Scientific Researchers	1	8	12	4	18
	Sub Totals	46	67	65	84	154
Skilled Engineering Trades	Electrical/Electronics Engineers	20	56	17	12	9
	Electricians, Electrical Fitters	16	34	24	38	26
	Goldsmiths, Silversmiths, Precious Stone Workers	0	1	0	0	1
	Lines Repairers and Cable Jointers	4	13	3	0	0
	Metal Machining Setters and Setter Operators	5	2	0	6	32
	Metal Working Production and Maintenance Fitters	92	28	53	57	49
	Precision Instrument Makers and Repairers	6	0	0	1	2
	Telecommunications Engineers	1	12	5	4	9
	Tool Makers, Tool Fitters and Markers-Out	1	0	6	8	1
	TV, Video and Audio Engineers	8	0	1	1	1
	Welding Trades	40	10	14	22	25
	Sub Totals	193	156	123	149	155
	Totals	258	233	205	246	334

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance, broken down by constituency.
(AQW 17493/11-15)

Dr Farry: I have placed the table detailing the total number of Northern Ireland domiciled students in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance, broken down by constituency for academic year 2011/2012, in the Assembly Library and on my Department's website. This is the latest year for which complete data is available.

Higher Education Expansion Catalyst Project

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, in relation to the Higher Education Expansion Catalyst Project contained within the One Plan, to detail (i) the current Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster; (ii) the MaSN cap when the One Plan was launched in 2010; (iii) what plans are in place to secure

a 1,000 increase in MaSN at the Magee Campus by 2013, and (vi) what plans are in place to expand the Magee Campus to 9,400 full-time equivalents by 2020.

(AQW 17499/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can confirm that there is no Maximum Student Number (MaSN) cap applicable to the Magee campus of the University of Ulster. The MaSN applies to the University as a whole and for the 2010-11 academic year, this was 12,668.

A total of 572 additional places have been allocated to the University of Ulster between December 2011 and November 2012. As an independent body, the University has the authority to determine where any of its student places are located. I understand, in the case of these additional 572 places, it has decided to allocate them to the Magee campus.

When I took office no additional places were envisaged, it is encouraging we have secured since then, the funding for 1,200 additional places.

Any further increase in MaSN will only be possible if additional funding is provided by the Executive. Bearing in mind the competing calls on public funds and the legitimate demands for additional places at other locations across Northern Ireland, the aspiration to have 9,400 full-time equivalents at Magee by 2020 would appear ambitious.

Programme-led Apprenticeship Scheme

Mr Newton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the cost of the Programme-Led Apprenticeship scheme in each of the last 3 financial years, and what is the budget for the current year.

(AQW 17519/11-15)

Dr Farry: The costs for Programme-Led Apprenticeships across the last three financial years since its introduction in September 2009 are:

2009/2010	£8 million
2010/2011	£24 million
2011/2012	£33 million;
2012/2013	£23 million (to the 30 November 2012)

The programme is demand-led and apprenticeships are funded across six funding categories ranging from £8,320 to £10,770 over the 104 weeks in training.

South Eastern Regional College: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the educational work that the South Eastern Regional College undertakes in North Down.

(AQW 17569/11-15)

Dr Farry: The South Eastern Regional College currently delivers outreach provision in six community centres within the North Down Borough Council Area. There are currently 409 enrolments in these centres, undertaking courses in areas such as Administration; Art, Design, Photography; Computing and Information Communication Technology; Essential Skills; Horticulture; and Languages.

The college has also, recently, delivered provision in cooperation with groups, such as the Cedar Foundation, the Well2 project (Well-being, Education, Living and Learning) and the Gransha Care Farm.

Software Testers Academy: Employment

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many graduates, who have completed the Software Testers Academy Skills Programme in the past year, have gained employment in the Information and Communications Technology Industry.

(AQW 17632/11-15)

Dr Farry: Nineteen graduates completed the first Software Testers' Academy, which started in October 2011.

Of this group of nineteen graduates, eighteen gained employment in the Information and Communications Technology Industry, seventeen as software testers. One graduate chose to take up employment in his original vocational area.

There has therefore been a very positive outcome to this first cohort of the programme. A second cohort commenced training in October 2012.

Welfare Reform: Mental Health

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to outline the plans his Department has in place to deal with the potential increase in workload resultant from claimants, particularly people who suffer from mental health issues, moving from Incapacity Benefit and ESA to the new work groups proposed under Welfare Reform.

(AQW 17672/11-15)

Dr Farry: Since 2010, staff in the Employment Service in my Department have dealt with many people with mental health conditions who have been moving from Incapacity Benefit (IB) to both Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). In addition to its highly trained professional staff working in front-line offices, the Employment Service has a range of programmes and services to help all of its clients progress towards, move into and sustain employment.

An interdepartmental Project Team is responsible for calculating the number of people who are likely to make a claim to the new Universal Credit across the different conditionality groups. Information on the likely volumes of claimants to the respective groups is still being developed. Therefore it is too early at this stage to make any assumptions as to potential workload increase for the Department's Employment Service as a result of the Universal Credit element of Welfare Reform.

Steps to Work: Evaluation

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the Steps to Work programme and how it can assist the increasing numbers of young people who are unemployed.

(AQW 17674/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Steps to Work (StW) programme is my Department's main adult return to work provision, the aim of which is to assist people who are unemployed or economically inactive to find and sustain employment.

StW is a flexible programme which offers opportunities for work experience, qualifications, training, assistance for those interested in self-employment and subsidised employment. The programme is available to anyone who is aged 18 years or over and who is unemployed or economically inactive.

A recent evaluation of the StW programme found that it had met its employment targets and was an effective employment intervention. The current target for Steps to Work participants moving into sustained employment for 13 weeks or more is 25%. From September 2008 to September 2011 (latest data available) an overall total of 28% was achieved.

My Department has recently introduced 'First Start', one of the measures announced as part of the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative. 'First Start', which is delivered through StW, provides a minimum of six months employment for 18 to 24 year olds in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance for 26 weeks or more and will support 1,700 jobs for young people over the next three years.

Job Centres: Army Recruitment Posters

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether Job Centres accept Army Recruitment posters; and whether there have been any reported incidents in the past month where offers of such posters have been declined.

(AQW 17711/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has a longstanding arrangement to promote both Army recruitment opportunities and those within the Armed Forces in general. Each Jobs and Benefits Office and JobCentre has access to a dedicated Armed Forces Liaison Officer which has helped to promote good working relationships.

Both my Careers staff and Employment Service staff maintain regular contact with the Army recruitment service at their various locations when there is a need to discuss recruitment for clients. More recently my Department invited the Army Recruitment Service to take part in a Jobsfair in Belfast on the 21 November 2012.

There is a network of 35 offices across Northern Ireland, which includes eight JobCentres and 27 Jobs & Benefits offices. I have checked with both the Employment Service and the Careers Service staff across the network and there have been no reported incidents of Army Recruitment posters being declined in the past month. Currently there is a range of information leaflets and posters displayed in the offices.

Further Education: Employment Prospects

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what analysis his Department has undertaken to assess the employment prospects of students who are taking courses at further education colleges.

(AQO 3062/11-15)

Dr Farry: The primary aim set out in the strategy "Further Education Means Business" is to support economic and workforce development. This means that the curriculum in the colleges must meet the needs of employers and of learners.

Around 90% of the college provision funded by my Department is professional and technical in nature, and leads to qualifications on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. The qualifications on this framework are based on nationally recognised occupational standards, and have been designed with input from employers.

Colleges also must focus their provision on the priority sectors which will rebuild Northern Ireland's economy.

It is, of course, important that learners achieve the qualifications that they set out to gain. In the 2011/12 academic year, there were learner retention and achievement rates of 88% and 84% respectively in respect of professional and technical provision. This extremely encouraging performance represents a 4% increase on the previous year's achievement rate and is excellent news for those who are seeking employment or who want to progress within their job.

To complement the core areas of study, colleges are responding to the demands from employers for prospective employees to also have a range of employability skills, including the right attitude, values and standards of behaviour.

For example, as part of their induction process, learners at the South Eastern Regional College participate in a three week intensive enterprise programme which includes team working, communication skills and problem based learning which is focused on identifying solutions to industry specific problems. This programme has been designed specifically to give students the edge in acquiring the skills that are critical to employers.

Provision to develop employability skills is replicated across the colleges.

It is clear that individuals' participation in further education increases greatly their employment prospects.

Education Maintenance Allowance

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the Review of Education Maintenance Allowance.

(AQO 3068/11-15)

Dr Farry: I can advise that my Department and the Department of Education launched a joint public consultation on the future of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme on Monday 30 July. The consultation ran for fourteen weeks and closed on Friday 2 November. The consultation document contained five options for the future structure of the scheme which were agreed with the Minister of Education. 62 consultation responses were received.

My Department and the Department of Education are now carefully analysing all responses received prior to making a joint recommendation on the future structure of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme. Final decisions on the way forward will rest with the Executive.

It is intended that all agreed changes to the scheme will be implemented from the 2013/14 academic year and an announcement made in order to ensure that current and prospective students are provided with sufficient notice of how any proposed changes to the scheme may affect them. It is also to ensure that there is sufficient time for the Student Loans Company, which administers the scheme on behalf of both Departments, to make the required changes to the ICT infrastructure, application forms and guidance documentation.

Agency Workers Directive

Mr Anderson asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of the impact that the Agency Workers Directive may have on workers and employers.

(AQO 3069/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Agency Workers Regulations, which transpose the Directive, have been in operation for less than a year. The Regulations are intended to increase the basic employment rights of agency workers, by bringing certain entitlements, such as pay and holidays, in line with those of directly-employed employees.

The cost and administration of these additional rights and entitlements inevitably have a knock-on impact on agencies and hirers. However, the introduction of a 12-week qualifying period for equal treatment was intended to offset the burden on business, compared with having equal treatment from day one of an assignment.

My Department will be carrying out a review of the operation and impact of these Regulations, and this will start early in 2013.

We are finalising terms of reference for a research project which will provide the evidence base for that review. It is intended that the research will cover the following issues: regulatory impact of the regulations; levels of awareness; the extent of compliance by agencies and hirers in providing access to the rights available under the regulations; and an assessment of whether there has been any under- or over-provision of rights.

Following completion of the research, I will ensure that the member is provided with a copy of the final report.

Student Places: Higher and Further Education

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has received requests from Queen's University Belfast and further education colleges for an increase in student places.

(AQO 3070/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Queen's University of Belfast made verbal representations from the Vice Chancellor and other senior staff to me for a share of the additional 500 STEM places and the further education colleges included additional MaSN places for higher education courses as part of their annual College Development Plans.

University of Ulster did not make any separate representations either verbally or in writing.

Apprenticeships: Job Creation Scheme

Mr Molloy asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an estimate of the cost of introducing a three year job creation scheme for training to apprenticeship level to address unemployment among the 18 to 35 age group.

(AQO 3071/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's aim is to promote learning and skills, to prepare people for work and to support the economy. It is my Department's primary role to enhance an individual's prospects of getting into the labour market.

To this end, my Department already funds apprenticeship training through its ApprenticeshipsNI programme. Demand is determined by employers who recruit apprentices linked to their business needs. On the 4 December 2012, there were 11,379 apprentices undergoing training. The Department is planning a publicity campaign in the New Year to increase awareness amongst employers of the value and benefits of the ApprenticeshipsNI programme with the aim of increasing the number of employers likely to take on an apprentice.

The active engagement of employers in creating apprenticeships is crucial in opening up opportunities for young people. Through the Executive's Jobs and Economy Initiative we will also encourage further employer engagement with ApprenticeshipsNI by supporting apprenticeship training for up to 900 additional young people that have participated on the Youth Employment Scheme.

The funding available under ApprenticeshipsNI ranges from £1,550 to £ 12,300 depending on the age of the apprentice and the apprenticeship being undertaken.

My Department also offers programme-led apprenticeships for 16 to 17 year olds, with extended eligibility for those with a disability or from an in-care background. These apprenticeships aim to assist school leavers who have been unable to secure an apprenticeship through employment due to the economic downturn.

The funding on offer ranges from £8,320 to £10,770 and these apprentices also receive a non-means tested educational maintenance allowance of £40 per week.

I am determined that in this downturn we continue to invest in the training of our young people so they are well placed to seize employment opportunities as these arise, particularly as we come out of recession.

Further Education Colleges: Higher Education Courses

Ms Fearon asked Minister for Employment and Learning whether his Department intends to increase the delivery of higher education at further education colleges in 2013.

(AQO 3072/11-15)

Dr Farry: I am fully committed to encouraging further education colleges to deliver higher education courses and believe they are best placed to provide intermediate level higher education qualifications such as Foundation Degrees. Within Graduating to Success, the higher education strategy, I have set a target to increase full-time or part-time Foundation Degree enrolments to 2,500 by March 2015 from a baseline of 1,132 enrolments in 2010.

I have demonstrated this commitment by allocating an additional 140 full-time higher education places to the colleges since December 2011. These additional places are to be allocated to colleges in four tranches over the academic years 2012/13 to 2015/16. There will be 47 new places allocated to colleges for the 2013/14 academic year.

These additional places will increase the total number of full-time Higher Education in Further Education places from 3,833 in 2010/11 to 3,973 by 2015/16.

There are also around 7,000 part-time higher education enrolments in further education. My Department does not place a cap on part-time higher education places and therefore expansion of part-time provision within existing budgets offers colleges another route to increase higher education provision.

For the academic year 2012-13, my Department has set a target of 11,018 higher education enrolments across all further education colleges. This is an increase of 536, or 5%, from the 2011-12 year.

Teacher Training Colleges: Integration

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for an update on the integration of teacher training colleges.

(AQO 3073/11-15)

Dr Farry: I recognise the need for change in the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland. I support the proposed merger of Stranmillis University College with Queen's University but as the proposal does not enjoy sufficient cross party political support I have not yet proceeded to introduce the necessary legislation to effect it. The situation we have in Northern Ireland today for the training of our teachers is not sustainable, particularly given the number of unemployed teachers, teachers on short-term contracts and other real financial priorities. We need to ensure that the system in place for teacher training is of the highest quality, is efficient, offers value for money and benefits our society.

I have initiated a review of the teacher training infrastructure in Northern Ireland. The first stage of this review which looks at the sustainability of the teacher training colleges is drawing to a conclusion and I would hope to update members on the outcome in the new year. The second stage will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education. Our objective must be to ensure that our teacher training infrastructure is fit for purpose in the 21st century.

Priorities for Youth: Consultation

Miss M McIlveen asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what input his Department provided to the consultation document 'Priorities for Youth' issued by the Department of Education.

(AQO 3074/11-15)

Dr Farry: The proposed new "Priorities for Youth" policy is primarily a matter for the Minister for Education.

During the development stage of the policy, officials from the Department of Education and my Department met and discussed possible linkages between the policies of both departments. I am keen to build on these linkages and will contribute to relevant cross-cutting issues when the final policy is being established.

The issues most aligned to my Department's objectives include tackling the barriers to learning and encouraging positive supportive environments that complement formal education.

In that regard the Executive's strategy for young people not in education, employment or training (NEET – 'Pathway to Success') is very relevant and indeed the 'Priorities for Youth' policy was referenced in that strategy.

'Pathways to Success' made clear that addressing the needs of young people not in education, employment or training was a multi-departmental responsibility that was agreed by the Executive. I therefore very much welcome the contribution that the Department of Education will make through the 'Priorities for Youth' policy.

The Strategy seeks to join up effectively actions being taken across the Executive. My Department will lead a NEET Advisory Group to facilitate a partnership approach and joint working with government Departments, the voluntary and community sectors, the education and health and social care sectors, local government and the business sector.

My Department's Careers Service will also continue to engage with young people to help them to develop effective career plans and address barriers which may prevent them from implementing these plans.

Further and Higher Education: Needs of Economy

Mr Givan asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how his Department ensures that further education colleges and higher education institutes provide services which meet the needs of the local economy.

(AQO 3075/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department's Skills Strategy, "Success Through Skills – Transforming Futures" sets the strategic direction for skills development in Northern Ireland, and outlines the key roles played by further education colleges and higher education institutions.

Further education colleges support the economy in a number of ways. Around 90% of colleges' provision leads to professional and technical qualifications on the Qualifications and Credit Framework. Through sector skills councils, employers contribute to the design and content of these qualifications, to ensure that their needs are identified and met.

Each college has a dedicated Business Support Unit to provide bespoke assistance to local employers in areas such as innovation, productivity, research and product design and development. The Employer Support Programme, which was launched in November 2011, provides colleges with £6.9m to support local small and medium-sized enterprises.

The Department's Assured Skills programme, has a capacity building strand aimed at providing the skills needs of current and future employers. For example, this programme has recently had highly successful projects in finance and ICT, which included up-skilling university and college lecturers to design and deliver bespoke provision for inward investors in these priority sectors.

The higher education sector contributes to the success of the local economy in a variety of ways, including

- ensuring an appropriate supply of good quality graduates with the right skills to meet the needs of the economy
- helping to generate investment in the local economy through research and development and international collaborations,
- and promoting knowledge transfer, business engagement and innovation

The sector therefore has a key role to play in the Executive's plan for economic growth. I have recognised that role and have recently allocated some 1200 additional STEM undergraduate places and 300 additional PhD places in areas of economic relevance and increased research and development funding by some £1m as we work to develop a modern sustainable knowledge-based economy.

Graduates: Appropriate Employment

Mr Clarke asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what action his Department has taken to help graduates to get appropriately paid jobs that relate to their qualifications.

(AQO 3076/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department has developed a number of programmes to help graduates get appropriately paid jobs. "INTRO" Entry to Management Programme The Graduate Entry to Management Programme has been offered since 2007, operating under the INTRO brand. The programme is designed to provide well trained managers for businesses in Northern Ireland while at the same time helping unemployed graduates gain employment.

The programme provides graduates at degree/HND level with three weeks off-the-job training in essential management skills such as leadership and team building, managing people, finance, marketing, business excellence and strategic planning and a 21 week salaried placement. During this time the graduate undertakes a measurable Business Improvement Project with an employer as well as mentoring support and guidance.

The Graduate Acceleration Programme

In recognition of the fact that lack of experience in the workplace was a barrier for graduates seeking employment my Department introduced the Graduate Acceleration Programme in January 2010 as a strand of Steps to Work provision.

The aim of the Graduate Acceleration Programme is to provide a relevant, graduate level work experience placement lasting up to 26 weeks combined with the opportunity to undertake a vocationally relevant qualification.

This programme allows the participants to gain experience thereby enabling them to compete more effectively for jobs in the current economic climate. In addition the programme helps to prepare them for future job opportunities.

Careers Service

My Department's Careers Service delivers impartial careers information, advice and guidance to help people realise their careers aspirations, enabling them to contribute positively to their community and to the Northern Ireland economy. This service is available to everyone including graduates.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Invest NI: International Conference

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Invest NI has any plans to repeat the March 2011 type of visit by International Sales Conference participants to the Coleraine area in 2013.
(AQW 17220/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Planning for Invest NI's International Conference in 2013 is at the early stages and locations have yet to be decided. Invest NI will be looking at the best way to engage with stakeholders as part of the conference programme.

Freight: Growth

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department envisages a growth in freight trade by sea and air over the next three years; and what action her Department is taking to support this.
(AQW 17280/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The overall focus of the Northern Ireland Economic Strategy is to improve our economic competitiveness in order to increase employment and prosperity for all. The Economic Strategy very clearly puts export-led growth at the centre of our ambitions.

All the measures identified within the Economic Strategy will support the growth of our private sector and lead to a greater number of our local firms competing in global markets and existing exporters entering new markets. By extension, I would expect this widening and deepening of our export base to result in the growth of Northern Ireland's freight trade.

Caravan Sites: Forest Parks

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which forest parks have caravan sites.
(AQW 17289/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A list of licensed caravan & camping sites is available on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) consumer website: www.discovernorthernireland.com/Licensed-Caravan-and-Camping-Sites-A2515

This is not an exhaustive list as NITB has no regulatory function over caravan & camping sites. NITB only inspects sites participating in its voluntary quality grading scheme with a view to assessing its star rating. The sites listed are licensed to operate by local councils.

Information provided by the Northern Ireland Forest Service on www.nidirect.gov.uk/camping-and-caravanning-in-forests states that caravanning and camping and facilities are available in the following forests which are managed by Forest Service:

- Castlewellan Forest Park;
- Drum Manor Forest Park;
- Glenariff Forest Park;
- Gortin Glen Forest Park;
- Gosford Forest Park; and
- Tollymore Forest Park.

Other forests and woodlands in Northern Ireland may offer camping and caravanning facilities.

There is a variety of organisations which own and manage forests and woodlands in Northern Ireland, which are open to the public.

These bodies include the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), The Woodland Trust, The National Trust, The Colin Glen Trust and various councils such as Belfast City Council and Down District Council.

More information about some of these forests and woodlands is available via the following link:

<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/information-and-services/leisure-home-and-community/leisure-and-recreation/outdoor-recreation/forests/public-forests-in-northern-ireland/other-forests-and-woodlands-open-to-the-public.htm>

Ministerial Directions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 16684/11-15, whether she will specify the decisions which were made as a result of Ministerial Directions.

(AQW 17346/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Each of the decisions related to support to individual organisations. The details of the decisions are commercially sensitive.

Vacant Factory Space: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of vacant former factory space in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17389/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI maintains an online database which contains the details of a range of available properties across both the private and public sectors. This information, whilst not available at the parliamentary constituency level, can be filtered by council area.

Invest NI is aware of 14 available factories within the City Londonderry council area. Further details on these and other available commercial properties can be found on the Northern Ireland Business Information website at www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

It is, however, important to be aware that the information within the database does not comprise a definitive list of all available properties. Invest NI is wholly reliant upon the accuracy of the information provided to it by commercial property agents and developers.

Invest NI: Vacant Industrial Land

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of vacant industrial land owned by Invest NI at Skeoge in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17390/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI holds a total of 75 acres of land at its Skeoge Industrial Estate. Whilst a significant proportion of this has been developed and is occupied by businesses there remain 32 acres available.

Land held by Invest NI is provided in support of economic development projects brought forward by qualifying businesses with an approved business case and immediate property need.

Vacant Office Space: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the amount of vacant office space in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17391/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI maintains an online database which contains the details of a range of available properties across both the private and public sectors. This information, whilst not available at the parliamentary constituency level, can be filtered by council area.

Within the City of Londonderry council area, Invest NI is aware of available office space across 30 properties. Further details on these and other available commercial properties can be found on the Northern Ireland Business Information website at www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

It is, however, important to be aware that the information within the database does not comprise an exhaustive listing of all available properties. Invest NI is wholly reliant upon the accuracy of the information provided to it by commercial property agents and developers.

Full-time Employment: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of full-time jobs, excluding full-time equivalents, created by each new inward investment company in the Foyle constituency since 2008.

(AQW 17392/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest Northern Ireland only reports on the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) number of jobs promoted. Therefore, it is not possible to provide detailed information on the number of jobs created.

China Visit: Assessment

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the benefits of her recent trip to China. (AQW 17421/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Member will be aware that I gave initial feedback on the benefits of the Invest NI Trade Mission to China on Wednesday 21st November. I am delighted to report that companies making up the Northern Ireland trade delegation continue to report a high level of enquiries following the mission – particularly our food and drink companies who were exhibiting at the Food Hotel China Exhibition.

However, doing business in China is driven by building relationships and enquiries are one thing – converting even a small proportion of these to orders is something else and this will take time, commitment and patience. That is why Invest NI under its Boosting Business initiative now supports companies to make up to three return visits to market following any trade missions or exhibitions.

The benefits of the trip extend well beyond those of our companies. I promoted our universities and further education colleges and believe there to be significant potential for our education sector to continue to develop its footprint in China. I promoted our tourism industry and again believe there is potential to grow the number of tourists visiting Northern Ireland.

Importantly we reached out to our Diaspora in both Shanghai and Hong Kong and it was clearly evident that there is a real desire from our Northern Ireland “ex-pats” to help out where they can. One has already offered to give up some time over his return home this Christmas and to share his experience of China with a number of companies from our drinks sector.

I have no doubt going forward we will see more tangible benefits of the visit.

Natural Gas: Offshore

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the prospect of finding off-shore natural gas. (AQW 17472/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The sedimentary basins offshore Northern Ireland are considered prospective for oil and gas, as indicated by the petroleum licence for six blocks surrounding Rathlin Island awarded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change to Providence Resources plc in February 2012. Blocks in the North Channel have been held under licence previously and this area was also made available in the recent 27th Round of offshore licensing which closed for applications on 1st May 2012.

The sedimentary basins lying below the seabed offshore Northern Ireland contain many of the same rock units that are found in the East Irish Sea Basin which contains the giant Morecambe gasfields and several smaller oil and gas fields. However, there are also significant differences in the geological history of the basins and there has been relatively little exploration in Northern Ireland’s offshore basins to date, with no exploration wells drilled. Because of this, there is a relatively high financial risk associated with exploration in the area offshore Northern Ireland compared to many other offshore UK basins, when considering the chances of making significant discoveries of oil or gas.

ni2012: Our Time Our Place

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what methods were used to market ni2012: our time our place, including the cost to date for each method.

(AQW 17503/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Marketing activity for ni2012 focused around key anniversaries and events such as the Titanic centenary; the opening of major attractions such as Titanic Belfast and the new Giant’s Causeway Visitor Centre; golf and the Irish Open at Royal Portrush; and events such as the stopover of the Clipper Round the World Race and Peace One Day concert.

ni2012 has been promoted through TV, radio, cinema, print, online and outdoor advertising; PR and publicity campaigns; attendance at major consumer and trade promotions; “Home of Champions” golf campaigns; co-operative marketing campaigns with air and sea carriers serving Northern Ireland; media and trade familiarisation visits to Northern Ireland.

For GB and overseas markets. In addition to Tourism Ireland’s core marketing activity the Department allocated an additional £4.7 million to Tourism Ireland for ni2012-specific promotional activity to be targeted at our main markets. The funds were allocated as follows:

GB	Offline and Online Advertising - TV, Print, Online and Outdoor	£2,400,000
	PR and Publicity Campaign	£400,000

	Consumer and Trade Promotions	£400,000
	Air/Sea carriers cooperative marketing	£585,000
	Golf Campaign	£200,000
US	Engagement with the US trade	£43,000
	Consumer Promotions	£7,000
	Golf - Home of Champions campaign	£150,000
	Air/Sea carriers cooperative marketing	£250,000
Europe	Consumer Fairs	£50,000
	Air/Sea carriers cooperative marketing	£165,000
All markets	NI Industry Overseas Activation Programme	£50,000
Total		£4,700,000

In Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland markets. Northern Ireland Tourist Board has spent the following to date:

Method:	NI	ROI	Cost
TV	129,206.31	301,481.38	430,687.69
Radio	128,769.14	300,461.32	429,230.46
Press/magazines	125,757.05	293,433.09	419,190.14
Outdoor	162,195.84	378,456.95	540,652.79
Online	74,646.52	174,175.20	248,821.72
Ambient Dressing	205,128.58	-	205,128.58
Total	825,703.44	1,448,007.94	2,273,711.38

ni2012: Our Time Our Place

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to where the ni2012: our time our place was targeted in terms of specific countries and regions, broken down by cost for each area to date.

(AQW 17505/11-15)

Mrs Foster: An extensive ni2012 promotional campaign has been underway overseas across the top four markets for tourism to Northern Ireland – Great Britain, the US, Germany and France. In addition, Tourism Ireland has been rolling out trade marketing and publicity campaigns for Northern Ireland in a further eighteen markets but with lower levels of resource and investment.

In GB and overseas markets. In addition to Tourism Ireland's core marketing activity the Department allocated an additional £4.7 million to Tourism Ireland for ni2012-specific promotional activity to be targeted at our main markets as follows:

Great Britain	£3,985,000
United States	£ 450,000
Europe	£ 215,000
All markets	£ 50,000
Total	£4,700,000

In the Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland markets. NITB has spent the following to date with approximately 70% of the spend being allocated to ROI:

Northern Ireland	£ 682,113
Republic of Ireland	£1,591,598
Total	£2,273,711

ni2012: Our Time Our Place

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) for her assessment of the ni2012: our time our place to date; and (ii) what specific input her Department had to the campaign.

(AQW 17506/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Tourism Ireland delivered the ni2012 campaign as a step-change campaign building on the key tourism product coming on line in 2012 and the key events planned for 2012 and 2013.

The vision for the campaign is to create a platform from which to reposition Northern Ireland as a place to visit, work, learn and invest. The main objectives are:

- Change global perceptions of Northern Ireland;
- Raise the profile of Northern Ireland as a must see visitor destination;
- Drive visitor numbers;
- Generate economic impact; and
- Increase civic pride.

The campaign can only be truly assessed over the next 4-5 years as we change global perceptions and raise our profile but there are already positive indicators.

On global perception and raising the profile of Northern Ireland

Through an annual brand tracking survey we have seen strong increases in Northern Ireland's competitive positioning overseas with interest in visiting increasing in 9 of 10 key markets measured. This is a positive indication of how ni2012 has achieved its objective of raising awareness and changing perceptions of Northern Ireland as a place to visit. In addition we have independent confirmation:

- Belfast has been voted one of the world's top destinations for 2012 by the National Geographic Traveller magazine;
- Trip Advisor has said Belfast is the best value UK city break;
- The Lonely Planet has described the city as 'buzzing'; and
- The Financial Times has also listed Belfast as one of the 'Top 10 places in the world' to hold a conference or major event.

On visitor numbers and economic impact

Final end year figures on all of our key markets are not yet available and while provisional estimates for GB and overseas indicate a potential downturn there are many indications of the positive impact of ni2012 this year and for future years such as:

- In the period up to end November Titanic Belfast has smashed its original targets and attracted more than 621,000 visitors;
- The Giants Causeway Visitor Centre has welcomed over 300,000 visitors from over 130 countries between July and mid November;
- The Irish Open had a record-breaking 130,000 spectators;
- The 'staycation' market is growing with expenditure by Northern Ireland residents on overnight trips during January to September 2012 increasing by 3% on the same period in 2011, with £122 million spent;
- There has been an increase in hotel occupancy rates during January-September 2012, with an estimated 1.4 million rooms and 2.2m bed-spaces sold. This is an increase of 11% when compared to January-September 2011;
- By the end of the 2012 cruise season Belfast will have welcomed 45 cruise ships bringing 80,000 passenger and crew, with a further 8 ships visiting Londonderry;
- 2013 promises a further increase with 58 cruise ships and 114,000 passengers due to visit Belfast. This will mark a growth of around 30% over two years. These cruise ship visitors and their associated spend are not captured in the official overseas visitor statistics and are therefore additional to the published figures; and
- A total of 32 major conferences have been secured by Belfast Visitor and Convention Bureau since April 2012 which will result in 14,000 delegates visiting the city up to 2016, with a £17.7 million boost to the economy.

On civic pride

The ni2012 campaign has captured the imagination with the tourism sector taking up the campaign alongside others outside of the sector. While not a direct tourism objective, raising civic pride indirectly impacts on the visitor as local residents who show pride in their city or town improving the overall experience:

- Evaluation reports on the ni2012 events are being finalised now, but early indications show that, on average, 90% of spectators attending all ni2012 events felt that events like these made them feel more proud of this country.

In summary, a campaign like ni2012 cannot be assessed against one year. The benefits of an initiative like ni2012 Our Time, Our Place alongside the opening of major attractions can only be assessed over the next 4-5 years as we change perceptions of Northern Ireland as a place to come and visit, invest, work and study. Initial indications of changing perceptions are very

positive and our new visitor attractions have given us new products to promote and build on for the long term as the economic climate improves.

Visitors: 2013 Events

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what action she is taking to ensure that events in 2013, such as the World Police and Fire Games, are utilised to address falling visitors numbers.

(AQW 17508/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The range of events in 2013 provide the perfect platform to build on the ni2012 campaign which has raised awareness of Northern Ireland as a new and exciting place to visit. My officials in the Department and NITB are working with key stakeholders to develop and support activity for 2013 to ensure that the momentum of ni2012 continues and the second year of this two-year step-change period continues to deliver against objectives.

Tourism Ireland will implement a comprehensive programme of promotional activity to highlight Londonderry as UK City of Culture 2013 overseas and other major events such as the World Police and Fire Games. We will also capitalise on the unprecedented opportunity of the G8 Summit, which will be hosted in Fermanagh, to showcase Northern Ireland – not only to world leaders but also to the international media.

Tourism Ireland and Northern Ireland Tourist Board

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail how much her Department has allocated to (i) Tourism Ireland; and (ii) the Northern Ireland Tourist Board in 2012 to date.

(AQW 17509/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Tourism Ireland was allocated £14.849 million in Financial Year 2012-13.
An additional £4.7 million was allocated to Tourism Ireland in year.
- (ii) NITB was allocated £22.343 million in Financial Year 2012-13.
An additional £4.545 million was allocated to NITB in year.

Quinn Group: Job Losses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the discussions that representatives from her Department or Invest NI have had with Senior Management within the Quinn Group with regards to the potential for further job losses.

(AQW 17524/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Both I and representatives of Invest NI have met regularly with Senior Management within Quinn Manufacturing Group to discuss ongoing operations.

The potential for job losses has been discussed and Quinn Manufacturing Group Senior Management confirmed that they do not have plans for job losses and continue to focus on consolidation and growth.

Caleb Foundation: Meeting

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 16616/11-15, to detail each of the range of issues that were discussed with the Caleb Foundation at the meeting on 2 March 2010.

(AQW 17525/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This meeting was held over 2 years ago and there is no official record of the meeting from which to detail the range of issues covered.

Broadband

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, in relation to the provision of Broadband UK, (i) what criteria will be used to prioritise the roll out, (ii) what are the timescales for the roll out and (iii) in what order will the roll out take place.

(AQW 17573/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Pursuant to my response to oral question AQO 2716/11-15 on 22 October, I would re-iterate that in prioritising the roll-out of broadband infrastructure under the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, my Department will consider matters such as the quality of solution designs, value and pricing, efficiency and economic viability, achieving the best value for money and providing services that are sustainable in the long term.

The intervention area for the project will be informed by the responses to the public consultation undertaken from 12 September to 19 October 2012. The feedback from this exercise is currently being analysed with the intention to publish the outcome on the DETI website by the end of 2012.

The timescales and logistics for the roll-out will be dependent on the project plans put forward by bidders responding to the procurement competition that the Department plans to commence in early 2013. It is however expected that any roll-out will be taken forward throughout 2013 and well into 2014.

Arm's-length Bodies

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how each of her Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others. (AQW 17623/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The table below shows the performance of the Department's Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) against the 30 day prompt payment target during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 financial years:

	2011-2012 %	2010-2011 %
Invest Northern Ireland	97	95
General Consumer Council for Northern Ireland	97	99
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	94	94
Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland	100	100

As regards whether any sector has been paid more quickly than any other, the information sought is not readily available and may only be obtained at disproportionate cost. However, the commitment towards the prompt payment of suppliers applies across all sectors.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect her Department. (AQW 17624/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Directive is likely to have a limited impact as the Department already applies the Northern Ireland Civil Service commitment to pay all suppliers within 10 days and is also bound by The Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 (as amended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debt Regulations 2002). It provides a statutory right for suppliers to claim interest on late payments of commercial debt. Payment is regarded as late if made outside the agreed terms, or 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice where no terms are agreed.

Insolvency: Appointment of Administrator

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what is the time frame for appointing an administrator when a company has been declared insolvent. (AQW 17630/11-15)

Mrs Foster: An administrator can be appointed at any time after a company has been identified as insolvent. This is subject to relevant statutory requirements to give notice to anyone holding security over company assets.

Tourism: Signage Policy

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, following the review of the Tourism Signage Policy, what consideration has been given to adjusting the siting and location of tourist signs for accommodation. (AQO 3085/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has reviewed the NI Tourism Signage Policy, which is operated by DRD Roads Service, to ensure it reflects developments in tourism and is more flexible in its implementation, given the evolving nature of tourism product and experiences. I wrote to the DRD Minister to present our recommendations for proposed amendments and we subsequently met on 4 December, 2012 where I set out the context to the review and recommendations made by my Department.

As regards tourism accommodation, my recommendations include the need to cover new tourist accommodation categories and greater flexibility in signposting from A and B class roads. As always, a balance between tourism and traffic management needs must be found.

My officials will meet with DRD officials in the New Year to examine the detail of the proposed recommendations and progress with implementation when agreement has been reached.

Visitors: Programme for Government Target

Mr McCartney asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the latest visitor statistics against the Programme for Government target of 4.2 million visitors by December 2014.

(AQO 3078/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Ambitious targets have been set to increase both visitor numbers and, more importantly, tourism revenue. The overall targets comprise GB and overseas, Republic of Ireland and domestic visitors. Our challenge is to return the GB and overseas markets to growth and despite the very challenging global economic conditions, I remain positive about our prospects for achieving our Programme for Government targets to 2014 as we build on the changing perceptions brought about by the ni2012 campaign and the exciting events planned for 2013.

Electricity: Price Reductions

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her efforts to secure a reduction in electricity prices for domestic consumers.

(AQO 3079/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 14.1% reduction in domestic electricity tariffs from 1st October this year represents an average yearly saving of £83 to householders. The Regulator reports that this tariff reduction means that the domestic tariff is currently 4% lower than the GB average and 15% lower than in the Republic of Ireland.

My Department continues to engage with new electricity suppliers, to support increased competition in the electricity supply market in Northern Ireland.

Furthermore, I very much welcome the Chancellor's recent announcement that Treasury will work with Brussels to secure an exemption from the Carbon Price Floor for Northern Ireland. In addition to ensuring a level playing field for Northern Ireland generators in the Single Electricity Market, it would mean consumers would not endure any tariff increase as a result of the new tax.

Natural Gas: Network Extension

Mr Hamilton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on her plans for the extension of the natural gas network.

(AQO 3086/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has completed a detailed economic appraisal on gas network extension to further towns in the West and North-West and to towns in County Down, including Hillsborough, Ballynahinch, Downpatrick, Saintfield and Crossgar. Next steps include bringing a paper to the Executive on government subvention for gas network extension to the West and North West, and liaising with the Utility Regulator regarding a competition for gas licences for this area in 2013.

Regional Start: Assessment

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the Regional Start Initiative to date.

(AQO 3087/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI has now awarded the contract for Regional Start to Enterprise Northern Ireland. Regional Start, which was launched on 8 October 2012, is an accessible service that will help deliver on Jobs Fund targets through Not in Education, Employment or Training and start ups from Neighbourhood Renewal Areas.

The initial contract period is for 2 years with a target of generating 6,500 Business Plans.

Invest NI has provided a list of 'work in progress' to Enterprise Northern Ireland as part of the move from Invest NI's Interim Service to Regional Start.

A significant uplift in business plan approvals is expected during December 2012 and January 2013.

Foreign Direct Investment

Mr Byrne asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how she plans to meet the demand for Grade A property for Foreign Direct Investment and indigenous expansion or consolidation.

(AQO 3088/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The availability of suitable office space is an important part of Northern Ireland's investment proposition.

Invest NI is aware of the concerns highlighted in the recent Lisney report concerning the lack of development of Grade A space.

It is the view of Invest NI that the current level of availability of Grade A office space is not having a negative impact upon investment within Northern Ireland.

Tír Eoghain Fleadh

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what support her Department can provide to existing hospitality businesses in Castlederg and the surrounding areas during the weekend of events scheduled to take place for the Tír Eoghain Fleadh in June 2013.

(AQO 3089/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not received an application for financial assistance towards this event. The event organisers have not contacted NITB to explore promotional and marketing opportunities nor support for this event.

Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross: Centenary

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why there has been no mention of celebrating the centenary of the formation of the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross in the decade of anniversaries proposals.

(AQO 3090/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Executive agreed that it was appropriate and necessary to set an inclusive tone to examining major centenarians over the decade 2012-22.

The intention is not that the Executive will organise events to mark every anniversary but will take a lead by setting the tone and providing a supportive environment for the many organisations who will celebrate these anniversaries.

The key anniversaries that have been highlighted by the Executive are the signing of the Ulster Covenant, World War 1/Battle of the Somme, the rise of the Labour Movement, Easter Rising, universal male and limited women's suffrage and the Partition of Ireland.

These events influenced or were the direct cause of many developments of which the formation of the RUC, following Partition, is one and therefore the Executive's approach to commemoration in support of those organisations who wish to mark such anniversaries would apply.

ni2012: Our Time Our Place

Mr Nesbitt asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the funding allocated to the ni2012: our time our place campaign.

(AQO 3091/11-15)

Mrs Foster: NITB was allocated a bespoke budget of £4.59 million towards Tier 1 Events for ni2012, including the landmark Titanic Belfast Festival 2012 in April/May, the Irish Open in June/July and the Clipper Homecoming Maritime Festival in Derry~Londonderry in July 2012

In addition, NITB marketing campaign spend for ni2012: our time our place totaled £4 million with £2 million from European funding, and £2 million core funding.

All of Tourism Ireland's campaigns for 2012 carried the ni2012 logo as part of its core marketing but an additional budget of £4.7 million was allocated to boost Tourism Ireland's ni2012-specific promotional activity.

The additional funds were allocated for TV, print, outdoor and online advertising, PR and publicity, consumer and trade promotions, extensive "Home of Champions" golf campaigns and co-operative marketing activity with air and sea carriers.

Department of the Environment

Prompt Payments

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of the Environment what practices, protocols and measures his Department has in place to ensure prompt payment by local government to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQW 16837/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I fully agree that there should be prompt payment by local government. I am engaging in a number of ways with local government to promote the improvement of the processes for paying suppliers, contractors and sub-contractors.

In June 2012, the Department issued guidance encouraging councils to meet the 10 day prompt payment target. I also issued guidance to standardise the collation of prompt payment statistics. Following a further meeting with officials, additional work is planned to improve performance in this area. Already, work is underway to establish councils' current software and processing capabilities in relation to recording and meeting the 10 day target and to scope options for addressing any issues that are identified. This will also inform the systems convergence work stream within the local government reform programme.

Disused Listed Buildings: Maintenance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what responsibility Departments have for the maintenance and upkeep of disused listed buildings within their estate.

(AQW 17396/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I refer you to my reply to AQW 16721/11-15 of 21 November which remains relevant.

The Northern Ireland Executive requires all government departments and agencies to set a good example in the care of their historic estate. This includes disused listed buildings. More information is available in the Protocol for the Care of the Government Historic Estate which was published by this department in June 2012. It can be downloaded:

http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/builthome/information/protocol_for_the_care_of_the_government_historic_estate.htm

Arm's-length Bodies: Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17549/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department's arm's-length bodies, the Northern Ireland Local Government Officers' Superannuation Committee (NILGOSC) and the Local Government Staff Commission (LGSC), are committed to the prompt payment of suppliers for goods and services in compliance with The Better Payments Practice Code.

Under this code proper practice is payment within 30 days from receipt of the goods or services or on presentation of a valid invoice, whichever is later, unless otherwise stated in the contract with the supplier.

NILGOSC and LGSC prompt payment performances for 2011/ 2012 are as follows:

- NILGOSC – 97.8% within 30 days (498 invoices paid, 11 considered as late payments);
- LGSC – 100% within 30 days (526 invoices paid within the 30 day limit, no late payments).

There is no distinction between sectors with regard to the timeliness of payments.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Parking Spaces: Civil Servants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants, broken down by each town and city; and (ii) when each allocation was last assessed to determine whether the space was essential.

(AQW 2077/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants is as follows:

Town / City	Number of Spaces	Total
Belfast	1,006	£997,583
Londonderry	8	£3,200
Lisburn	19	£5,180
Omagh	93	£22,912
Armagh	29	£3,999
Banbridge	30	£6,399
Total	1,185	£1,039,273

All Departments review the need for spaces on an annual basis

INTERREG IV: Cross-border Groups

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of employees of INTERREG IV Cross Border Groups broken down by (i) job title; (ii) salary range; (iii) total annual pension contributions; and (iv) bonuses received, in each year of the Programme.

(AQW 16360/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The following table shows the information requested for the Cross Border Groups.

Year	Job Title	Salary Range¹	Pension Contributions	Bonuses Received
2007/08	1 x Development Officer	£46,293 - £50,253	£29,976.53	NIL
	1 x Senior Project Officer	£30,600 - £37,545		
	2 x Project Officer	£23,751 - £29,730		
	1 x Administrative Assistant	£18,909 - £22,845		
	1x Clerical Officer	£11,577 - £16,218		
2008/09	1x Chief Executive	£60,434 - £61,038	£51,384.01	NIL
	1 x Senior Project Officer	£31,439 - £38,575		
	1 x Group Manager	£31,754 - £34,549		
	1 x Programme Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	2x Development Officer	£27,849 - £51,484		
	2 x Project Officer	£24,402 - £30,546		
	2 x Finance Officer	£27,849 - £30,011		
	1 x Assistant Finance Officer	£18,450 - £20,235		
	1 x Administrative Assistant	£19,427 - £23,473		
	1 x Administrator	£15,137 - £17,985		
	1 x Clerical Officer	£11,995 - £16,663		
	2009/10	2x Chief Executive		
1x Corporate Manager		£45,701 - £48,557		
1 x Senior Project Officer		£31,754 - £38,961		
1 x Group Manager		£31,754-£34,549		
2 x Programme Manager		£31,754 - £37,206		
2x Development Officer		£27,849 - £51,484		
1x Communications Officer		£27,573 - £29,714		
3 x Project officer		£24,402 - £30,851		
4 x Finance Officer (1 P/T)		£14,587 - £30,011		
1 x Assistant Finance Officer		£19,621 - £21,519		
1x Senior Administrator		£22,001 -£23,473		
2x Administrator (1 P/T)		£16,054 - £19,126		
1 x Administrative Assistant		£19,621 - £23,708		
1 x Clerical Officer		£12,145 - £16,830		

Year	Job Title	Salary Range¹	Pension Contributions	Bonuses Received
2010/11	2x Chief Executive	£49,043 - £61,038	£82,124.63	NIL
	1x Corporate Manager	£46,158 - £49,043		
	2x Programme Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	1x Development Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	1 x Senior Project Officer	£31,754 - £38,961		
	1 x Group Manager	£31,754-£34,549		
	1 x Development Officer	£27,849 - £31,754		
	1 x Communications Officer	£27,849 - £30,011		
	3x Project Officer	£24,646 - £30,851		
	5 x Finance Officer (1 P/T)	£22,221- £31,754		
	1 x Assistant Finance Officer	£19,621 - £21,519		
	1x Senior Administrator	£22,227- £23,708		
	2 x Administrator (1xP/T)	£16,054 - £19,126		
	1 x Administrative Assistant	£19,621 - £23,708		
2011/12	2x Chief Executive	£51,901 - £65,713	£82,821.65	NIL
	1x Corporate Manager	£46,158 - £49,043		
	2x Programme Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	1x Development Manager	£34,549-£37,206		
	1 x Group Manager	£31,754 - £34,549		
	1 x Senior Project Officer	£31,754 - £38,961		
	1x Development Officer	£27,849 - £31,754		
	1 x Communications Officer	£27,849 - £30,011		
	3x Project Officer	£24,646 - £28,636		
	4x Finance Officer (1 P/T)	£22,221 - £31,754		
	1x Assistant Finance Officer	£24,646 - £26,276		
	1x Senior Administrator	£22,221- £23,708		
	1 x Administrative Assistant	£19,621 - £23,708		
	1 x Clerical Officer	£12,145 - £16,830		

Year	Job Title	Salary Range ¹	Pension Contributions	Bonuses Received
2012/13	2x Chief Executive	£58,919 - £65,713	£57,405.422	NIL
	1x Corporate Manager	£46,158 - £49,043		
	2 x Programme Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	1x Development Manager	£34,549 - £37,206		
	1 x Group Manager	£31,754 - £34,549		
	1 x Senior Project Officer	£31,754 - £38,961		
	2x Development Officer	£27,849 - £37,206		
	3x Project Officer	£24,646 - £30,851		
	4 x Finance Officer (1 P/T)	£22,221 - £31,754		
	1x Assistant Finance Officer	£24,646 - £26,276		
	1x Senior Administrator	£22,221 - £23,708		
	1x Administrator	£17,161 to £19,126		
	2 x Administrative Assistant	£15,725 - £23,708		

- 1 Salary scales identify the minimum and maximum remuneration of job title identified. This does not reflect the salary progression of each employee within this band.
- 2 Pension contributions are only available for the 2012-13 period from four of the five groups and represent part year payments.

Government Contact Centre: British Telecom

Mrs Dobson asked Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process that led to awarding British Telecom the contract for handling calls from members of the public to Government agencies.

(AQW 17142/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Strategic Partner contract includes a range of services, including contact centre capability and business development, in addition to ICT expertise, support and infrastructure. The process that led to the award of the contract commenced through the NI Direct Strategic Partner Procurement Project in July 2011. The procurement process complied with public procurement policy and used the competitive dialogue procurement process. The stages of this process are outlined overleaf.

Stage	Completion date
Pre-Qualification Questionnaire	12 September 2011
Invitation to Participate in Dialogue	28 October 2011
Invitation to Submit Outline Solutions	19 January 2012
Invitation to Submit Detailed Solutions	5 April 2012
Invitation to Submit Final Tenders	25 July 2012
Identification of Preferred Bidder	12 September 2012
Award of Contract	23 October 2012

Procurement: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what proportion of public procurement contracts, in the last three years, have been awarded to small and medium sized enterprises; and what was the value of each contract.

(AQW 17243/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Annex 1 sets out the public procurement contracts awarded by Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) on e-SourcingNI categorised by size of supplier organisation. The Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) does not have access to details of individual contracts awarded by other CoPEs. The value bands into which these contracts fall have been identified and are provided for the last three years. They exclude any contracts awarded outside e-SourcingNI. The figures for the 2012-2013 year are provided up to October 2012.

Annex 1 - e-SourcingNI Percentage CoPE Contract Awards by Supplier Size 2009-2012 (October)

Supplier Awards 2009-2010	Contract Value						
Supplier Size	Under £10k	Under £30k	Under £100k	Under £1m	Under £3.5m	Over £3.5m	Grand Total
Large (251 or more staff)	8.05%	6.00%	8.05%	4.98%	0.64%	1.40%	29.12%
Medium (51 to 250 staff)	8.17%	4.47%	4.34%	2.81%	0.51%	1.40%	21.71%
Small (11 to 50 staff)	8.56%	4.60%	6.00%	3.32%	1.02%	1.02%	24.52%
Micro (1 to 10 staff)	5.75%	6.51%	4.85%	1.66%	0.38%	0.00%	19.16%
Unknown	1.28%	1.40%	1.40%	1.02%	0.38%	0.00%	5.49%
Grand Total	31.80%	22.99%	24.65%	13.79%	2.94%	3.83%	100.00%

Supplier Awards 2010-2011	Contract Value						
Supplier Size	Under £10k	Under £30k	Under £100k	Under £1m	Under £3.5m	Over £3.5m	Grand Total
Large (251 or more staff)	5.50%	3.37%	4.12%	3.57%	1.10%	1.03%	18.69%
Medium (51 to 250 staff)	6.87%	4.67%	3.71%	4.40%	1.51%	1.51%	22.68%
Small (11 to 50 staff)	13.81%	6.53%	4.81%	4.05%	1.79%	0.34%	31.34%
Micro (1 to 10 staff)	6.60%	5.70%	2.68%	4.05%	3.16%	0.00%	22.20%
Unknown	1.51%	1.37%	0.69%	1.24%	0.14%	0.14%	5.09%
Grand Total	34.30%	21.65%	16.01%	17.32%	7.70%	3.02%	100.00%

Supplier Awards 2011-2012	Contract Value						
Supplier Size	Under £10k	Under £30k	Under £100k	Under £1m	Under £3.5m	Over £3.5m	Grand Total
Large (251 or more staff)	7.48%	2.77%	2.23%	2.98%	0.97%	0.71%	17.15%
Medium (51 to 250 staff)	8.70%	3.40%	2.56%	4.16%	1.51%	0.46%	20.81%
Small (11 to 50 staff)	17.91%	7.27%	4.37%	4.71%	1.43%	0.29%	35.98%
Micro (1 to 10 staff)	9.12%	4.88%	3.78%	2.02%	0.50%	0.13%	20.43%
Unknown	2.94%	1.30%	0.55%	0.59%	0.21%	0.04%	5.63%
Grand Total	46.15%	19.63%	13.49%	14.46%	4.62%	1.64%	100.00%

Supplier Awards 2012-2013	Contract Value						
Supplier Size	Under £10k	Under £30k	Under £100k	Under £1m	Under £3.5m	Over £3.5m	Grand Total
Large (251 or more staff)	7.01%	1.39%	3.04%	2.84%	0.86%	0.93%	16.07%
Medium (51 to 250 staff)	9.92%	2.98%	2.78%	5.95%	1.06%	1.39%	24.07%
Small (11 to 50 staff)	15.67%	4.96%	5.29%	5.22%	0.93%	0.86%	32.94%
Micro (1 to 10 staff)	10.32%	3.97%	3.51%	3.77%	0.60%	0.07%	22.22%
Unknown	2.25%	0.86%	0.66%	0.53%	0.20%	0.20%	4.70%
Grand Total	45.17%	14.15%	15.28%	18.32%	3.64%	3.44%	100.00%

Tables may not add up due to roundings

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the reduction in the estimated revenue for 2009-10, compared with the estimates for 2008-09 and 2010-11, which were published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 17244/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. It has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

In producing this report, DFP officials liaise with counterparts in the Office for National Statistics rather than Treasury to request, and where necessary clarify, the information required to produce the fiscal balance estimate in line with the GERS methodology. The data used to derive the individual estimates which are then aggregated to provide the overall estimate of Northern Ireland revenue is taken from the Office for National Statistics PSAT2 Database. Details of the methodology employed and the various sources of data used in estimating total public sector revenue in NI are outlined in Annex B of the report. In particular, table B1 provides a summary of the apportionment methods applied and the source of data used to estimate each revenue stream.

Estimated revenue trends for UK and NI from 2006-07 to 2010-11 are provided in table 3.5 of the report. These estimates suggests that a number of key revenue elements in 2009-10 (i.e. Income Tax, Corporation Tax, National Insurance Contributions and VAT) fell vis-a-vis the 2008-09 estimates before recovering somewhat in 2010-11.

As stated in the most recent report for 2009/10 and 2010/11, estimates have been revised from previous reports as a result of changes in methodology, the use of alternative data sources and revision of figures previously used. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that the figures within this report are estimates and should therefore be viewed as such. Variations in methodologies or the subsequent provision of more actual data could produce a more accurate reflection of the true fiscal balance.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to explain the reasoning for the variations in the estimations of revenue which occur within the series of Net Fiscal Balance Reports produced by his Department between May 2010 and November 2012.

(AQW 17245/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. It has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

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Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11; and how it will be used by his Department.

(AQW 17246/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. It has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report

provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

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As stated in the most recent report for 2009/10 and 2010/11, estimates have been revised from previous reports as a result of changes in methodology, the use of alternative data sources and revision of figures previously used. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that the figures within this report are estimates and should therefore be viewed as such. Variations in methodologies or the subsequent provision of more actual data could produce a more accurate reflection of the true fiscal balance.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the ways in which his Department liaises with the Treasury regarding sources and estimations of revenue.
(AQW 17247/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland for the financial years 2006-07 to 2010-11. It has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual expenditure or revenue items – many of these have been estimated, in the absence of actual regional data, on the basis of high level assumptions and apportionment factors. Rather the report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

In producing this report, DFP officials liaise with counterparts in the Office for National Statistics rather than Treasury to request, and where necessary clarify, the information required to produce the fiscal balance estimate in line with the GERS methodology. The data used to derive the individual estimates which are then aggregated to provide the overall estimate of Northern Ireland revenue is taken from the Office for National Statistics PSAT2 Database. Details of the methodology employed and the various sources of data used in estimating total public sector revenue in NI are outlined in Annex B of the report. In particular, table B1 provides a summary of the apportionment methods applied and the source of data used to estimate each revenue stream.

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As stated in the most recent report for 2009/10 and 2010/11, estimates have been revised from previous reports as a result of changes in methodology, the use of alternative data sources and revision of figures previously used. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that the figures within this report are estimates and should therefore be viewed as such. Variations in methodologies or the subsequent provision of more actual data could produce a more accurate reflection of the true fiscal balance.

Procurement: Foyle

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many companies based in the Foyle constituency have (i) applied for; and (ii) been successful in securing tenders for work based in the constituency in each of the last three years.
(AQW 17260/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below sets out the activity of supplier organisations in relation to competitions run by Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) on eSourcingNI, and that have identified themselves as being based in the Foyle constituency.

Period	Supplier Activity			
	Interest	Responded	Awarded	Grand Total
2009-2010	119	8	7	134
2010-2011	116	24	14	154

Period	Supplier Activity			
	Interest	Responded	Awarded	Grand Total
2011-2012	234	58	31	323
2012-2013	177	44	32	253
Grand Total	646	134	84	864

'Interest' indicates that tender documents have been downloaded; 'Responded' indicates that tender responses have been submitted, and 'Awarded' means contracts have been awarded. The figures for 2012-2013 are current up to October 2012.

In relation to the statistics for work based in the Foyle constituency, the Central Procurement Directorate does not have access to details of contracts awarded by other CoPEs and many of the contracts are not tied to a specified location. However an examination of contract titles suggests that of the eighty four awarded at least fourteen relate, at least in part, to work based in the Foyle constituency.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many companies have (i) applied for; and (ii) been granted Small Business Rate Relief in the Foyle constituency since the inception of the scheme.

(AQW 17261/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There is no application procedure for Small Business Rate Relief. Relief is applied automatically by Land & Property Services to all businesses that qualify.

Information on the number of companies that have been granted Small Business Rate Relief since the inception of the scheme is not available at constituency level as data is collated at district council level only. As at 25th November 2012, Small Business Rate Relief has been awarded for a total of 1,580 properties within the Derry City Council area since the scheme commenced in April 2010.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in the (i) Coleraine Borough Council; and (ii) Limavady Borough Council areas will benefit in 2013 from the extension of the small business rates relief scheme.

(AQW 17285/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is estimated that there will be another 154 ratepayers in Coleraine Borough Council and another 47 ratepayers in the Limavady Borough Council that will benefit in 2013 from the extension of the small business rates relief scheme following implementation of the required legislation.

The 20% reduction will be applied automatically to the 'turn of year' bills which will be issued around April 2013.

Census: Self-identification

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the current treatment of individual identity in the census complies with the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies which was published by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation High Commissioner on National Minorities on 7 November 2012, including specifically the primacy of voluntary self-identification.

(AQW 17333/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Section 15 of the Ljubljana Guidelines covers the collection and processing of information to provide robust evidence to support policy development. The section makes specific reference to the Census.

I am content that the 2011 Census met the requirements outlined in Section 15 of the Ljubljana guidelines.

Treasury: Meetings

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many times he and his departmental officials have met with Treasury Ministers or officials regarding local sources and estimations of revenue.

(AQW 17381/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I have met with Treasury Ministers on numerous occasions over the last two years to discuss a range of taxation policy issues where the level of revenues raised locally was of direct relevance in terms of either a potential cost to the Northern Ireland block grant or local industry.

Recently these have included four meetings of the Joint Ministerial Working Group on Rebalancing the Northern Ireland Economy to discuss the devolution of Corporation Tax where Treasury was represented by the Exchequer Secretary.

I met with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury last month to discuss the impact the Carbon Price Floor would have in Northern Ireland, while I have also had a number of meetings with both the current and previous Economic Secretaries to discuss both the devolution of the Air Passenger Duty and the suspension of the Aggregates Levy Credit Scheme.

My officials are also in frequent contact with HM Treasury counterparts as we continue to progress these important issues.

Corporation Tax

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the distinctions between the methodology employed by his Department and that of the Treasury in estimating corporation tax, including the strengths and limitations of the each methodology.

(AQW 17382/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Firstly, it is important to recognise that both methodologies are estimates of local corporation tax take – actual receipts attributable to Northern Ireland are not separately recorded by HMRC.

The Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 provides an overview of public sector finances in Northern Ireland by applying the methodology originally designed to produce the “Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland” (GERS) publication. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items such as corporation tax. The report aggregates these to provide an overall assessment of Northern Ireland’s broader fiscal position.

The Net Fiscal Balance Report’s corporation tax estimate has been produced in line with GERS methodology by apportioning a share of UK Corporation Tax receipts on the basis of Northern Ireland’s share of UK profits. While this is a simple and transparent approach, it is also based on a very high level assumption and should be interpreted with caution. For example, the extensive system of allowances and reliefs in the current UK corporation tax regime means that relative profit levels may not accurately reflect the Northern Ireland share of UK corporation tax receipts. This point is acknowledged in the report.

As part of the March 2010 Rebalancing the Northern Ireland economy consultation document, HM Treasury also included an estimate of the level of Northern Ireland corporation tax receipts in 2009-10. While the HM Treasury estimate also has a number of caveats, it is based on a more detailed analysis of actual company tax returns. However, at that stage the HM Treasury estimate did not include the Corporation Tax liabilities in respect of the Northern Ireland activities of companies registered in the rest of the UK. Estimating the potential scale of these additional liabilities and the implications they might have for the costs associated with devolving Corporation Tax was a key element of the work of the Joint Ministerial Working Group which has now passed its report to the Prime Minister.

Manufacturing Closures: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the manufacturing firms that have closed down in the Foyle constituency since 2008 and the number of jobs lost in each firm.

(AQW 17388/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is not possible to provide information on the total number of jobs lost or manufacturing firms that have closed down in Foyle as requested. NISRA collect information on the number of jobs at a particular point in time from all relevant businesses registered on the Inter Departmental Business Register and therefore can only provide the net change between two points in time.

Table 1 below provides information on the net change in the number of manufacturing firms operating in the Foyle constituency and employee jobs within these firms in the Foyle constituency as measured by the biennial Census of Employment in 2007 and 2011. The net decrease in employee jobs takes into account both job gains and losses during the period.

Table 1 Number of Manufacturing Jobs and Firms in Foyle Constituency

Year	Number of firms	Number of Employee Jobs	Employee Job Change
2007	142	4,699	
2011	155	3,302	-1,397

Table 2 below provides information on the number of large and small manufacturing firms operating in the Foyle constituency and employee jobs within these firms.

Table 2 Number of Manufacturing Jobs and Firms in Foyle Constituency by Large and Small Firms

Year	Number of Large firms*	Number of Employee Jobs in large firms	Number of Small firms*	Number of Employee Jobs in small firms
2007	17	3,294	125	1,405
2011	10	2,385	145	917

* Large firms have been defined as being firms with employee jobs of 50 or more. Small firms are those with 49 employee jobs or less.

Suicide: Registration

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW-16437/11-15, for his assessment of the (i) efficiency; and (ii) speed of the process by which a suicide is registered.

(AQW 17405/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As was indicated in my response to AQW 16437/11-15 a death which occurs due to any cause other than natural illness must be referred to the Coroner.

The registration process does not commence until the Coroner's certificate is received. I am satisfied that deaths are registered efficiently and speedily by the registration service. There are thus no plans to change the death registration process.

Suicide: Registration

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to simplify the suicide registration process.

(AQW 17406/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As was indicated in my response to AQW 16437/11-15 a death which occurs due to any cause other than natural illness must be referred to the Coroner.

The registration process does not commence until the Coroner's certificate is received. I am satisfied that deaths are registered efficiently and speedily by the registration service. There are thus no plans to change the death registration process.

Suicide: Statistical Accuracy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for his assessment of the accuracy of official suicide figures, given the length and complex process for suicide registration.

(AQW 17407/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated vital statistics, which include suicide statistics, as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Death registrations undergo ongoing quality checks and suicides are given specific additional scrutiny.

Statistics on suicide include cases where the cause of death is either 'Suicide and self-inflicted injury'¹ or 'Undetermined injury whether accidentally or purposefully inflicted'². All such registered deaths are based on a coroner's certificate. Clearly the coroner takes time to fully investigate any suicide. On average the length of time between a suicide occurring and being registered is just over 12 months. For example of the 289 suicides registered in 2011 (the published figure), 120 actually occurred in 2011, with the remainder occurring in earlier years.

Annual/quarterly death statistics, including suicide statistics, are published on a registration date basis and are clearly labelled as such. However further suicide statistics based on occurrence date are also published, but due to the time taken for the coronial process, these statistics are only published a number of years in arrears.

1 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes X60-X84, Y87.0

2 International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision codes Y10-Y34, Y87.2

Business: Taxation System

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether he will set up a departmental assessment of the financial impacts, on his Department and on business rate payers, of replacing the existing non-domestic rates charge on the fixed property assets of business ratepayers with a tax on the net profits of a business.

(AQW 17418/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Changing the basis of local taxation in this way would present a variety of legal, administrative and revenue issues. For a start it is doubtful whether Northern Ireland has the legal competence to change to a basis of taxation that so resembles a national tax. Furthermore, I would question the wisdom of moving away from a system of taxation that operates throughout the British Isles.

It would be extremely expensive to administer for both government and business. Its impact would be uneven and difficult to gauge. Some parts of the business community would be able to conceal profit, for example by shifting profit outside Northern Ireland; small local business would not have that advantage. The revenue yield would be difficult to predict and the system would be too volatile to use as the basis for funding local and regional services.

Whilst the system we have in place is far from perfect it has to be viewed in the context of its fit with other taxes on business and I do not believe that the business community would welcome such a radical move. Whilst I can understand why many struggling businesses would be attracted by any ideas that raise the prospect of paying less tax, I think such thoughts are governed by the principle that the only fair tax is the one that someone else pays.

You might be interested to know, however, that over 50% of business ratepayers get some form of relief of concession on their rates bill. This Executive has gone to considerable lengths to provide this level of support and will continue to look at ways to help businesses through the downturn, as my recent announcements about extending reliefs demonstrate.

For all of these reasons, I have no plans to set up such a “departmental assessment”.

Business: Rates Revaluation

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why he is incurring the cost of a 2015 business rates re-valuation, given that his declared intention is to maintain the present anticipated income from business rates by increasing the rate charge per pound.

(AQW 17419/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Revaluations are undertaken primarily for the sake of ratepayers, not government and are a regular feature of all business rates systems. A Revaluation makes sure that liability for rates is spread across all sectors in line with up to date rental values. It is not an exercise designed to take more money from the system, nor is it about delivering widespread relief. It is about rebalancing the rating burden to reflect changes in relative value with the aim of making the system fairer.

Those business premises that have experienced rental value decreases more than the average (since the last general Revaluation in 2003) will pay less following a Revaluation. Conversely, those areas and business sectors that have fared better than others over the period since the last Revaluation will face higher rate bills from April 2015. This is despite the fact that values have declined across the board since the downturn.

NI Water: Rates Arrears

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the monetary loss to NI Water due to recorded rates arrears in the last three years.

(AQW 17454/11-15)

Mr Wilson: None, directly, as NI Water is funded through the Northern Ireland DEL allocation, via the Department for Regional Development, rather than the Regional Rate.

Northern Ireland Audit Office: Budgetary Cut

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel which legislation empowers him to announce a cut in the budget of the Northern Ireland Audit Office in the next two financial years without reference to the Audit Committee.

(AQW 17488/11-15)

Mr Wilson: On the 7 November 2012 the Executive agreed a number of revisions to budgets for 2013-14 and 2014-15. This included the reduction of a number of departmental budgets. These budgets were reduced following an analysis of past underspend performance trends and an assessment of what resources would be needed to deliver services over the next two years. The key objective, from the Executive's perspective, was to ensure that unused resources could be redirected to front-line public services as quickly as possible.

In terms of the Northern Ireland Audit Office reduced allocations, the amount concerned (£167k) is considerably less than the £473k and £666k year-end resource underspends recorded in Final Outturn by the organisation in each of the last two years. Therefore the proposed reductions in the next two years should have no impact on the Audit Office and, in parallel allow resources to be released now for reallocation. The Audit Committee will want to consider this aspect further when fulfilling its statutory requirements. The Executive continues to support fully the important role that the Northern Ireland Audit Office fulfils.

Arm's-length Bodies: Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17545/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP has five arm's-length bodies.

Prompt payment performance for the period April 2012 to October 2012 for the Public Service Commission and the Lay Observer was as follows:

Arms-length body	April - October Performance		
	No. of Payments	No. of Payments Paid Within 30 Days	% Paid Within 30 Days
Public Service Commission	3	3	100%
Lay Observer	9	9	100%

Prompt payment statistics for the Statistics Advisory Committee, NI Building Regulations Committee and Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (NI) Governance Group are not separately recorded on the departmental accounting system. However, combined annual expenditure for these bodies is less than £7k, and for the period April 2012 to October 2012 the Department as a whole has paid 98.54% of valid invoices within 30 days of receipt.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect his Department.

(AQW 17546/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The late payment directive currently passing through Westminster is not expected to significantly impact upon the Department.

The Department is already legally bound to meet the terms of the Late Payment of Commercial debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended and supplemented by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002. Payment should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice. If payment is not made within 30 days or agreed terms then the supplier has the right to claim interest and late payment compensation.

For the period April 2012 to October 2012 the Department has paid 98.54% of valid invoices within 30 days of receipt.

Furthermore, in line with DFP guidance issued in November 2008 and now contained in the guidance 'Managing Public Money Northern Ireland' which applies to all NI Departments, the Department is committed to paying as many invoices as it can within 10 (working) days.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the difficulties that arise when allocating shares of UK tax revenue to each of its constituent countries, which are referred to on page 14 of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11; and what steps have been taken to resolve these difficulties.

(AQW 17556/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The key difficulty in assessing Northern Ireland's Net Fiscal Balance position is that regional tax data is not routinely published by HMRC. Therefore it is necessary to estimate Northern Ireland's share of the various tax revenues that are collected nationally in the UK. To do this, DFP applies the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication.

This approach, by necessity, involves making some high level assumptions in allocating tax revenues. This is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. Rather the report aggregates these to provide an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's broader fiscal position.

In some cases, revenue figures can be directly attributed to Northern Ireland and require no further estimation. Examples include inheritance tax revenue and national insurance contributions. However, the majority of public sector revenues are collected centrally and their distribution by region is often unavailable. In these instances, UK figures are apportioned to Northern Ireland using specific methodologies that are summarised in table B1 of the report.

In general, the revenue elements are apportioned either by Northern Ireland's share of UK population or Gross Value Added or by our share of UK expenditure on, or consumption of, the particular item upon which a duty is applied. Alternative methodologies could potentially involve a variation of these apportionment factors, but the approach taken in producing the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 uses those deemed most appropriate as per the GERS methodology, which has been specifically developed and refined for the purpose of estimating the fiscal balance.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the cases in which a variety of alternative methodologies could be applied, each leading to variations in estimates, as referred to on page 42 of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11; and to detail the range and nature of the methodologies which are relevant to each case and the reasoning behind the selection of the methodology used within the Report and the rejection of other potential methodologies.

(AQW 17588/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The key difficulty in assessing Northern Ireland's Net Fiscal Balance position is that regional tax data is not routinely published by HMRC. Therefore it is necessary to estimate Northern Ireland's share of the various tax revenues that are collected nationally in the UK. To do this, DFP applies the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication.

This approach, by necessity, involves making some high level assumptions in allocating tax revenues. This is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. Rather the report aggregates these to provide an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's broader fiscal position.

In some cases, revenue figures can be directly attributed to Northern Ireland and require no further estimation. Examples include inheritance tax revenue and national insurance contributions. However, the majority of public sector revenues are collected centrally and their distribution by region is often unavailable. In these instances, UK figures are apportioned to Northern Ireland using specific methodologies that are summarised in table B1 of the report.

In general, the revenue elements are apportioned either by Northern Ireland's share of UK population or Gross Value Added or by our share of UK expenditure on, or consumption of, the particular item upon which a duty is applied. Alternative methodologies could potentially involve a variation of these apportionment factors, but the approach taken in producing the

Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 uses those deemed most appropriate as per the GERS methodology, which has been specifically developed and refined for the purpose of estimating the fiscal balance.

NI Direct Contract: BT

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel (i) whether, when awarding the new NI Direct Contract to BT there was a precondition that all staff employed are Access NI checked; (ii) whether these checks have taken place; and (iii) how many staff have been checked.

(AQW 17628/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The NI Direct contract included obligations on BT to ensure that BT staff who will have access to the NICS network, ICT systems and information, as a result of providing the services under the contract, must be Access NI security cleared to the appropriate level.

98 BT staff require to be Access NI security cleared to work on NI Direct and 79 of these have been cleared. The remaining staff have submitted their Access NI forms and await clearance.

Civil Service Priority Pools: Foyle

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 15527/11-15, what is the average waiting time for a transfer from the priority pool to another post in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17683/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below shows the number of staff currently listed on the Civil Service Priority Pools for transfer to the Foyle constituency and the average length of time they have been waiting in the pools.

Number on priority pools	Average time on priority pools
12	656 days

Historical data is not available as once an employee is transferred, the relevant data is removed from HR Connect pools records and this information cannot be reproduced. The answer provided relates therefore to those currently on priority pools.

A5: Reinvestment and Reform Initiative

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, in light of the Autumn Statement from the UK Chancellor that the Executive can now defer £50 million of borrowing through the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative from 2012-13 to 2014-15, will this consequential be used to fund the A5 road.

(AQW 17695/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The deferment of some £50 million RRI borrowing from 2012-13 to 2014-15 which I had agreed with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and which was announced by the Chancellor in the Autumn statement is to be welcomed. As you will be aware the A5 project is currently subject to legal challenge and decisions on profiling of spend cannot be taken by the DRD Minister until the outcome of that legal challenge is known.

This deferment of RRI borrowing allows the Executive to now accommodate the changing profile of A5 spend.

Net Fiscal Balance Report

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail in full the calculation used to estimate the share of income tax in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, including references to the source data.

(AQW 17701/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, the UK figure for income tax is taken from the PSAT2 database published by ONS, and is presented net of tax credits. Northern Ireland's share of UK income tax is derived from the Survey of Personal Incomes (SPI) produced by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This share is then applied to the UK figure for income tax published by HM Treasury.

The latest SPI survey provided data for 2009-10. Therefore, the 2009-10 apportionment ratio was also used for 2010-11. It should also be noted that the SPI data includes some records which cannot be allocated to a particular region - these have been excluded from the total used to estimate the NI share.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items such as income tax revenue. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Senior Civil Service: Declarations of Interest

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what arrangements are in place for the declaration of interests by Special Advisers, including business interests and any key personal relationships within the senior civil service.

(AQW 17759/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to the answer I gave on 23 October 2012 (AQW 15561/11-15). The arrangements in place for all civil servants, including Special Advisers, regarding declarations of interest apply irrespective of the nature of any potential conflict of interest and are underpinned by the Standards of Conduct chapter of the Northern Ireland Civil Service HR Handbook which, amongst other things, addresses such issues as honesty, integrity and misuse of position.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Patient Referrals: Private Treatment

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many Health Service patients were referred to private clinics and private surgeons for treatment within the United Kingdom in the last five years.

(AQW 17259/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The Health and Social Care Board procures services for Health and Social Care patients from independent sector providers in Northern Ireland on occasions when demand exceeds the HSC Trusts' capacity to deliver treatment within the specified elective access target waiting times.

My department began collecting information on completed waits within the Independent Sector from the beginning of 2008/09. Consequently information on the number of attendances in the Independent Sector in Northern Ireland is only available from 2008/09.

Data on the number of outpatient and inpatient attendances at an Independent Sector provider within Northern Ireland for each of the last four financial years, is shown in the table below.

Financial Year	Total Number of Attendances	
	Outpatients	Inpatients
2008/09	40,863	23,715
2009/10	54,873	21,404
2010/11	28,124	7,183
2011/12	48,762	15,905

Source: Departmental Return IS1 (Parts 1 and 2)

In addition, patients may be referred for treatment at private clinics outside of Northern Ireland, either because they require services not provided in Northern Ireland or because capacity in Northern Ireland is limited. The table below shows, for each of the last four financial years, the number of outpatient and inpatient attendances at private clinics within the United Kingdom (but outside of Northern Ireland).

Financial Year	Total Number of Attendances	
	Outpatients	Inpatients
2008/09	4,327	2,189
2009/10	3,121	1,320
2010/11	5,869	810
2011/12	3,548	920

Source: Health and Social Care Board

Gerry McGeough: Alleged Neglect

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety pursuant to AQW 16433/11-15, whether Gerry McGeough has submitted any formal complaint personally or through his legal team to the Northern Ireland Prison Service in relation to this or any of his previous allegations.

(AQW 17267/11-15)

Mr Poots: Mr McGeough has not made any formal complaints about healthcare matters to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust who provide prison healthcare services. He has submitted one complaint to the Northern Ireland Prison Service regarding his medication.

Cancer: Screening for Young Women

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what screening services are available for young women who are at high risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer.

(AQW 17307/11-15)

Mr Poots: Surveillance of women who are at higher risk of developing breast cancer is currently provided through the symptomatic breast service. I have however recently asked the Health and Social Care service to put in place arrangements to incorporate women at high risk, i.e. those who are at 8 times the normal risk, into the Northern Ireland Breast Screening Programme from April 2013. This will allow a more consistent approach, using national protocols, to be implemented for the surveillance of these women.

Two clinical trials are currently ongoing looking into screening tests for ovarian cancer that may be helpful for women in general and women at high risk of ovarian cancer. I will consider the implications for Northern Ireland when the findings for these trials are published.

Altnagelvin Area Hospital: Radiotherapy Unit

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what staffing positions will be required when the Radiotherapy Unit becomes operational at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 17335/11-15)

Mr Poots: Work is currently underway to ensure that staff will be in place when the Altnagelvin Radiotherapy Unit opens in 2016. The Health and Social Care Board has recently given approval to the Western Health and Social Care Trust to recruit for two key leadership posts in medical physics and therapeutic radiography. These positions will help provide the strategic leadership vital to shaping the services at the Unit. Other staff (by discipline/department) required include:

- Consultant Oncologists;
- Therapeutic Radiographers;
- Medical Physics: Clinical Scientists, Planning and Engineering Technicians;
- Pharmacy;
- Ward Nurses;
- Pathology;
- Medical Imaging;
- Allied Health Professions;
- Secretarial and Administrative;
- Facilities Management

Pancreatic Cancer

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much his Department has spent on (i) the treatment; (ii) the diagnosis; and (iii) raising awareness of pancreatic cancer, over the last five years.

(AQW 17342/11-15)

Mr Poots: Unfortunately information on expenditure related specifically to (i) the treatment (ii) the diagnosis and (iii) raising awareness of pancreatic cancer over the last five years is not available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

My Department consistently raises awareness regarding epidemiological research of certain conditions e.g. smoking and obesity which can increase the risk of a range of health conditions including some cancers.

RGN Recruits

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of RGN recruits, who have been recruited in the last twelve months, have been offered (i) permanent; and (ii) temporary contracts.

(AQW 17351/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the percentages of medical and qualified nursing recruits from the last twelve months offered permanent and temporary contracts, excluding fixed-term medical training rotations appointed by the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency.

Percentage of recruits to HSC Trusts on Permanent or Temporary contracts in the last year

Contract Type	Medical staff	Qualified Nursing
Permanent	57.5%	74.4%
Temporary	42.5%	25.6%

These percentages are derived from figures received from the Health and Social Care Trusts, and have not been validated by the Department.

Medical Recruits

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what percentage of medical recruits, who have been recruited in the last twelve months, have been offered (i) permanent; and (ii) temporary contracts.

(AQW 17352/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below shows the percentages of medical and qualified nursing recruits from the last twelve months offered permanent and temporary contracts, excluding fixed-term medical training rotations appointed by the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency.

Percentage of recruits to HSC Trusts on Permanent or Temporary contracts in the last year

Contract Type	Medical staff	Qualified Nursing
Permanent	57.5%	74.4%
Temporary	42.5%	25.6%

These percentages are derived from figures received from the Health and Social Care Trusts, and have not been validated by the Department.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect his Department.

(AQW 17365/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following consultation, the Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU is due to be adopted in the UK in March 2013. The Directive highlights that public authorities are required to pay suppliers within 30 calendar days of receipt of an undisputed invoice, with the option to extend this period for certain sectors, such as healthcare, to 60 days.

For those payments made directly by my Department, the current terms are within 30 calendar days of receipt of an undisputed invoice. It is therefore anticipated that the Directive will have minimal impact on my Department's payments.

However, the majority of payments made by the Department's Arms Length Bodies are made under the terms and conditions of the Business Services Organisation (BSO) Procurement and Logistics Service (PaLS) contracts, which state that payment is due at the end of the month following the month in which the invoice or goods and services are received, whichever is the later. This is in accordance with the extant late payment legislation.

At a meeting in June 2012, the HSC Regional Procurement Board took the decision to implement a standard 30 days payment terms for BSO PaLS contracts with effect from September 2013. Legal advice is being sought to determine the impact of the Late Payment Directive on the timing of the implementation of the standard 30 days payment terms.

Retired Social Workers

Mr McCallister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 13914/11-15, (i) whether the retired workers competed for their roles in the same way as other advertised posts within the Health Service; (ii) why the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust does not advertise for social work bank staff; and (iii) whether the Trust is in breach of employment regulations by not advertising such posts.

(AQW 17380/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised that, (i) as part of the Trust's flexible employment practices and to promote age equality, retired workers can opt to change their contract of employment from a permanent contract to a bank contract and thereby work as and when required by the Trust and accept work as they wish. In these circumstances recruitment to the permanent post is advertised in the normal way; (ii) the South Eastern Trust's Fostering Team have externally advertised for bank staff to complete fostering assessments as places were in demand and the Trust has plans to develop this further in the future to cover the general Social Worker's Bank list; (iii) I am satisfied that the steps taken by the Trust to employ Bank staff during periods when there are unplanned shortfalls in staffing levels does not breach employment regulations.

Early Years Provision

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department has sought to prioritise Early Years provision, including reprioritising budgets.

(AQW 17399/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department has policy responsibility for the delivery of health and social care services in Northern Ireland and recognises the importance of early intervention has in improving population health and wellbeing outcomes. While it is important to remember that early intervention can occur at any stage in a person's life, a number of measures have been prioritised to ensure that children have the best possible start in life. This reflects overwhelming evidence that children's life chances are most heavily predicated on their development in the first years of life.

The Families Matter, Healthy Child, Healthy Future and the Maternity strategies aim to support all parents and include parenting and family support programmes as key components. In addition, the draft year public health strategic framework Fit and Well: Changing Lives 2012-22, proposes that early years should be a strategic priority.

In 2012/13, £2.8m was allocated through my Department's Families Matter strategy to support services that deliver early intervention family support initiatives. Many of these services are aimed at supporting families and children in the earliest years.

In addition to this funding, the HSC Board, the Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership and the PHA have are each seeking to re-prioritise funding for early intervention programmes initiatives that seek to ensure the best outcomes for children during their early years.

The PHA is currently seeking to develop a suite of evidence based early years interventions that improve outcomes for children during their early years. They have secured significant investment for a number of pilot initiatives with the aim of identifying new ways of delivering the best outcomes for children and young people through early intervention during the early years.

The PHA have secured £2m through the Support for Parents strand of OFMdFM's Delivering Social Change framework. From 2013/14 this funding will be utilised to deliver a two year suite of evidence based early years interventions to complement and expand promising programmes and introduce new programmes in NI.

Protect Life Strategy

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much money has been invested in the Protect Life strategy in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17403/11-15)

Mr Poots: The amount of funding invested by the Public Health Agency in the Protect Life strategy in each of the last three years is set out below:

2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
£6.660m	£6.960m	£7.291m

In addition, other Health Service funding was allocated to implementation groups for suicide prevention as follows: £338,336 (2009/10) and £336,783 (2010/11).

Further details on the breakdown of this funding have been published in the "Evaluation of the Northern Ireland Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action plan 2006-2011" which is available on the DHSSPS website. Appendix K of the evaluation report also identifies substantial funding from departments, other than Health, that contributes to the promotion of positive emotional wellbeing and mental health.

Ageing Population: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what plans the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust has to deal with the health issues of the ageing population in the North Down area.

(AQW 17420/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern Local Commissioning Group working with the Health and Social Care Trust has developed a draft Population Plan to take forward the implementation of 'Transforming Your Care' (TYC) which includes a number of key areas of particular relevance to older people. The prioritised initiatives laid out in the Population Plan are to address the changing demographics and social complexity which will lead to increased demand on Health and Social Care Services. The initiatives will improve targeting for early intervention and preventative services, enhance joined up partnership working across all sectors, and maximise the use of technology to support the needs of the population and manage demand.

Examples of initiatives include:

- Development of Partnerships of Older People's Projects, focusing on falls and social exclusion;
- Development of a screening tool to assess and screen older people at risk of malnutrition within a home, residential, acute or community setting;

- Development of a reablement programme to maximise the independence of older people;
- Implementation of the Trust's 'Falls and Osteoporosis Strategy';
- Review of Statutory Residential provision to ensure that other models of care are developed to support people to live as independently as possible; and
- Introduction of telecare to support older people in their own homes.

The draft Population Plan is currently the subject of the consultation on the proposed changes emerging from Transforming Your Care. The consultation period runs until 15 January.

Private Healthcare Companies

Mr Lunn asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the proportion of health spending that was allocated to private healthcare companies for the provision of health and social care services in each of the last five financial years.

(AQW 17426/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information is not available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Obesity: Public Health Strategies

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the report detailing the cost of obesity to the Health Service, what public health strategies are being pursued to increase exercise, particularly cycling and walking.

(AQW 17441/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Framework for Preventing and Addressing Overweight and Obesity in Northern Ireland 2012 – 2012, known as A Fitter Future for All, was launched on 9th March 2012. This Framework aims to “empower the population of Northern Ireland to make healthy choices, reduce the risk of overweight and obesity related diseases and improve health and wellbeing, by creating an environment that supports and promotes a physically active lifestyle and a healthy diet” and its implementation is being led by the Public Health Agency.

The Department works in partnership with Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the Sport Matters strategy, and Department of Regional Development on the Active Travel strategy, both of which help to promote increased physical activity in a range of settings. In addition, the Public Health Agency supports a number of schemes to promote participation in cycling and walking across Northern Ireland.

Transport Policy: Public Health

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what input his Department has to ensure that public health is taken into account when strategies involving transport policy are being developed.

(AQW 17443/11-15)

Mr Poots: Transport has major health impacts for example through accidents, levels of physical activity, effects on air pollution, social cohesion, access to a range of services, including to employment. My Department therefore encourages the completion of Health Impact Assessments on all relevant developing policies as detailed in the policy toolkit from the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister. My Department also continues to work with the Institute of Public Health to provide advice and support in the completion of Health Impact Assessments during the policy-making process.

As part of the development and implementation of the cross-Departmental Obesity Prevention Framework: A Fitter Future for All, bi-lateral discussions continue to take place between my Department and other Departments on the development and implementation of relevant supporting policies and strategies.

In addition my Department is a member of the Active Travel Forum and input into the development of the Department of Regional Development's draft Active Travel Strategy which in turn contributes to the outcomes in A Fitter Future for All.

Transport: Southern Health Trust

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail by, programme of care, the amount of money being spent by the Southern Health Trust on using (i) private hire taxis; and (ii) rural transport services to transport service users to day care services.

(AQW 17455/11-15)

Mr Poots: Unfortunately, information on the expenditure incurred by the Southern Health and Social Services Trust on transporting service users to day care services by private hire taxis and rural transport services is not available and can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Rural Transport: County Boundaries

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Rural Transport Schemes are prohibited from operating across county boundaries.

(AQW 17456/11-15)

Mr Poots: Public and community transport arrangements in Northern Ireland, including Rural Transport Schemes, are a matter for the Department for Regional Development.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service's Patient Care Service provides pre-booked non-emergency transport for patients attending outpatient appointments and those being discharged from or transferred between hospitals who have been assessed by a medical practitioner as needing it. In addition, Health and Social Care Trusts operate transport fleets to facilitate client access to social care services, for example, day care.

Rural Transport: Hospital Appointments

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether Rural Transport Schemes are not permitted to bring patients to hospital appointments and to outline the rationale behind this, given the pressure on ambulance services.

(AQW 17457/11-15)

Mr Poots: Public and community transport arrangements in Northern Ireland, including Rural Transport Schemes, are a matter for the Department for Regional Development.

The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service's Patient Care Service provides pre-booked non-emergency transport for patients attending outpatient appointments and those being discharged from or transferred between hospitals who have been assessed by a medical practitioner as needing it. In addition, Health and Social Care Trusts operate transport fleets to facilitate client access to social care services, for example, day care.

Sick Absence: Health and Social Care Trusts

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are the current levels of sick leave among staff in each Health and Social Care Trust; and what is the trend of sickness absence since 2007.

(AQW 17460/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information relating to sickness absence monitoring by Health and Social Care Trust is published on a bi-annual basis and can be accessed on the departmental website:

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/hrd/wpu/wpu-monitoring.htm>

The bi-annual trend in sick absence rates in each HSC Trust since April 2007 is provided in the table below. Note that there is a seasonal variation in sick absence, with rates being higher in the October to March period. The trend in sick absence compared to 2007 is generally downward when comparing the same bi-annual periods.

Percentage of working days lost (sick absence rate) April 2007- September 2007 to October 2011 - March 2012

Period	HSC Trust					
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	NI Ambulance Service
April 2007-Sept 2007	6.5%	6.4%	5.6%	5.5%	5.2%	7.6%
Oct 2007-March 2008	6.9%	6.3%	6.4%	5.5%	6.0%	9.2%
April 2008-Sept 2008	5.6%	5.6%	5.4%	4.9%	5.9%	6.6%
Oct 2008- March 2009	6.2%	6.0%	6.1%	5.0%	5.8%	7.3%
April 2009-Sept 2009	5.6%	5.1%	6.2%	4.9%	5.2%	6.7%
Oct 2009-March 2010	6.4%	5.4%	5.8%	5.2%	5.2%	8.1%
April 2010-Sept 2010	5.6%	4.9%	5.5%	4.6%	4.9%	6.7%
Oct 2010-March 2011	6.0%	5.5%	5.6%	5.2%	5.0%	7.2%
April 2011 - Sept 2011	5.1%	5.2%	4.8%	4.9%	4.6%	6.4%
Oct 2011-March 2012	5.8%	5.4%	5.6%	5.3%	4.7%	8.0%

Source: Monitoring of Human Resource Activity Returns, HR Directorate DHSSPS.

Type 1 Diabetes: Parental Support

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what support his Department offers parents of children who are diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

(AQW 17464/11-15)

Mr Poots: At the time of diagnosis of Type 1 diabetes, parents are provided with information about how to manage their child's diabetes, administer insulin, test blood glucose and what to do if the child's blood sugar levels are low.

Children and their families are in regular contact with the paediatric diabetes nurse after diagnosis and once the child's condition is stable they are reviewed on a quarterly basis at the diabetes clinic. The diabetes specialist nurse is also able to liaise with relevant agencies, including the child's school, in order to support the needs of the child and their parents.

Since 2009 all children are being offered a structured patient education programme called 'CHOICE' (Carbohydrate and Insulin Collaborative Education). Parents of younger children are encouraged to attend this.

There are also several trusted websites where information is available to families such as Diabetes UK and Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

Sexual Harassment: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what policies are in place in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service to address complaints of sexual harassment in the work place; and whether it is procedure to notify the PSNI of such complaints.

(AQW 17489/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) have a Harassment Policy and Complaints Procedure and complaints of sexual harassment when reported are investigated under this policy and procedure.

NIFRS considers each case on its merits and if it is regarded as a criminal matter, it would be reported to the PSNI following discussion with the complainant.

The Harassment Policy and Complaints Procedure are currently subject to review and will be replaced with a Dignity at Work Policy.

Causeway Hospital: Trust Transfer

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions he has had with the Western Health and Social Care Trust on the possible transfer of the Causeway Hospital out of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 17490/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have to date had no discussions with the Western Health and Social Care Trust on the option to transfer the Causeway Hospital. The issue has however been discussed between my Department, the Health and Social Care Board and the Trust.

The public consultation on the proposed changes emerging from Transforming Your Care is currently underway and will continue until 15 January 2013. The consultation document sets out three options in regard to the future networking arrangements involving the Causeway, including the option that the Causeway would become the responsibility of the Western Trust. The aim is to ensure the future provision of safe, sustainable and resilient services for the population of the area. The options need to be considered carefully and the current consultation exercise provides the opportunity for everyone to give their views.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Car Tax Regulations

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what discussions have taken place with HMRC to ensure that cars operated by personnel in the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service are fully compliant with tax regulations covering (i) private mileage; and (ii) private use.

(AQW 17491/11-15)

Mr Poots: Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) confirm that staff are not permitted to use Fire Service vehicles for private use whilst off duty. There is no tax liability for Flexi Duty Officers whilst on duty.

NIFRS Flexi-Duty Officers' vehicles are classified as 'emergency vehicles' and HMRC has given a dispensation to NIFRS in respect of emergency vehicles under Section 248A ITEPA 2003 / Sc 81 Finance Act 2004.

NIFRS seek advice and guidance from HMRC as and when required on compliance with tax regulations.

Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm: Altnagelvin Area Hospital

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17013/11-15, (i) why Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm operations are no longer performed in Altnagelvin Hospital; (ii) why they stopped in October 2010; and (iii) whether there are plans to re-introduce this service.

(AQW 17498/11-15)

Mr Poots: Altnagelvin Area Hospital performed only a very small number of Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm (AAA) procedures. As with other low volume complicated surgical specialties the available evidence and professional consensus is that outcomes are better in larger units. The Western Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust therefore ceased providing AAA surgery at Altnagelvin hospital in October 2010 and all patients requiring this surgery are transferred to Belfast. At present, the Belfast HSC Trust is the only service provider in Northern Ireland that meets the quality standards for AAA surgery set by the Vascular Society of Great Britain and Ireland. A regional review of vascular services across Northern Ireland is currently underway. As part of this review the Health and Social Care Board will consider the most appropriate arrangement for the provision of AAA surgery for the population of Northern Ireland, consistent with UK national standards.

Hospitals: Toilets for People with Disabilities

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety which hospitals have changing places toilets for people with disabilities.

(AQW 17511/11-15)

Mr Poots: At present no hospitals in NI provide "Changing Places" Toilets. All Hospitals within Northern Ireland currently provide public ambulant toilets and wheelchair accessible toilets, which allow a wheelchair user to independently use the facilities.

Missing Children

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many children, recorded as missing since 2009, have not been returned to either parental or Social Services care before their eighteenth birthday.

(AQW 17520/11-15)

Mr Poots: The information requested is not centrally available within the DHSSPS. The information requested may be available from the PSNI.

Speech Therapy: Computer Availability

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many computers are available for use by staff in each speech therapy unit across the various Health and Social Care Trusts; and what is the speech therapist to computer ratio.

(AQW 17521/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care Trusts have provided the following information for their respective areas:

Trust	Number of computers	Speech Therapist to Computer Ratio
BHSCT	121	1: 0.72
NHSCT	28	1: 0.65
SEHSCT	88	1: 0.93
SHSCT	55	1: 0.58
WHSCT	64	1: 1.02

Sexual Orientation: Support

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to provide mainstream support for families and young people on issues relating to sexual orientation.

(AQW 17533/11-15)

Mr Poots: Health and Social Care is provided on the basis of need. The Department and its Arm's Length Bodies are subject to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which requires public authorities to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between nine designated equality groups one of which is sexual orientation. Policies are screened to assess their impact on each of the groups and where possible mitigations are introduced to address any adverse impacts or special needs.

In relation to public health, the Public Health Agency takes a dual population-wide and targeted approach in the delivery of services. The targeted approach is directed towards communities and individuals who are at increased risk in any area

of public health. Men who have sex with men are known to have elevated risk of poor sexual health, and LGB&T people generally are at increased risk of suicide and poor mental wellbeing. These issues are addressed through services provided under the Sexual Health Promotion Strategy and through the Protect Life Strategy.

In addition, to help address the needs of children and young people in a more effective way, the Health and Social Care Board and the Public Health Agency have established the Children and Young Peoples Strategic Partnership (CYSP). A sub-group of the CYSP will focus on the health needs of LGB&T young people and will develop an action plan to address issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Diabetic Retinopathy: Screening

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is current interval for diabetic retinopathy screening in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 17552/11-15)

Mr Poots: The screening interval standard for the Diabetic Retinopathy Screening Programme (DRSP) is 12 months however due to photography staff shortages at the start of 2012, the screening interval increased for some General Practices to 18 months. The staff shortages were addressed in the summer and with a full complement of staff in place from September 2012, the DRSP expect the screening interval to reduce to 15 months by the end of December 2012 and to restore the standard screening interval of 12 months for all General Practices by 31 March 2013.

Genito-urinary Medicine Clinics: Waiting Times

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the waiting time for genito-urinary medicine clinics; and for his assessment of the adequacy of the current service provision in meeting the demand for this service.

(AQW 17554/11-15)

Mr Poots: The latest available published waiting times for consultant led outpatient appointments at Genito Urinary Medicine (GUM) clinics, which relate to the quarter ending September 2012, are outlined in the following table:

	Waiting time (in weeks)							Total Waiting
	0-6	6-9	9-13	13-18	18-21	21-26	>26	
Northern Ireland	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	30

These figures indicate that, in general, the current service is able to meet demand.

Healthy Eating and Exercise: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is doing in the North Down area to promote healthy eating and exercise.

(AQW 17563/11-15)

Mr Poots: There are a wide range of services and projects funded by the Public Health Agency to contribute towards the promotion of physical activity and encourage healthy eating. These are delivered by various partners including the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust, Councils and organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

Many of the services addressing healthy eating and physical activity are delivered on a regional or Trust-wide basis and therefore include the North Down area.

PHA Projects and services which are specific to North Down area include:

- Community Development worker for North Down;
- Kilcooley Allotment Worker;
- Kilcooley Community Health Development Worker;
- Workplace Health initiative; and
- Age Concern over 50s

Cancer Treatment: Independent Funding Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15541/11-15, in which circumstances may an Independent Funding Request exceed the one week response time.

(AQW 17582/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care (HSC) Board has advised that the process for considering individual funding requests (IFR) is a robust one and that where the HSC Board has been provided with the necessary information, there should not be a circumstance where a response to a request from the referring HSC Trust is not provided within one week of the date of the (weekly) meeting of the HSC Board's IFR Panel.

Remote Access

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has given consideration to the use of new technology to aid specialists in one hospital to remotely assess patients in another.

(AQW 17644/11-15)

Mr Poots: Yes I have actively promoted the application of technology to improve patient care. There are a number of initiatives already underway. The Telepresence robot which has recently been introduced in the High Dependency Unit at Daisy Hill Hospital will allow intensive care specialists at Craigavon Area Hospital to assess patients without the need for transfer. The Northern Ireland Picture Archiving and Communications System (NIPACS) which was launched in 2009 allows specialists in one hospital to access both radiology reports and the associated images acquired in another hospital resulting in quicker diagnosis and treatment. In addition, multi-disciplinary (MD) teams caring for cancer patients use technology to actively communicate with each other during MD team meetings without having to travel to a single location. The Electronic Care Record which is being introduced will allow specialists in one hospital to access information on patients acquired in another hospital.

Work is currently underway on projects to allow some patients to be reviewed by hospital doctors from home or local hospitals/health centres using video conferencing technology; and to allow speech therapists to provide therapy remotely via video conferencing.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Direct Payment Schemes

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is an approved schedule of services that would be funded by Health and Social Care Trusts' direct payment schemes; and what are the hourly and daily rates that would apply.

(AQW 17657/11-15)

Mr Poots: The aim of direct payments is to promote independence. In order to achieve this, Trusts should seek to leave as much choice as possible in the hands of the individual, allowing people to address their own needs in innovative ways whilst satisfying themselves that the person's assessed needs are being met and that public funds are being spent appropriately.

The Health & Social Care Board has advised me that when arranging a Direct Payment, a Trust will discuss how the potential recipient intends to secure services to meet their assessed needs. My Department's guidance to Trusts makes it clear that Trusts are encouraged to explore innovative and creative options to meeting a client's needs, whilst still achieving value for money. Trusts can supply information on approved providers to Direct Payment recipients, as required, but would not be serving the principles of individual choice and control were they to require recipients to contract with only certain providers.

Ulster Hospital: Fiftieth Anniversary

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to mark the 50th anniversary of the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald.

(AQW 17665/11-15)

Mr Poots: On 29 October 2012 a year of events began to mark the 50th anniversary of the Ulster Hospital, Dundonald. A photographic exhibition, depicting the hospital's history and early years, was mounted in the foyer. Cake and cupcakes were delivered to every ward and as many departments as possible, and also made available in the staff restaurant. Former and current members of staff were invited to take part in a media photo call.

UTV spent several weeks in the Ulster Hospital making a documentary on the hospital's history and its place in the community. "The People's Hospital" was broadcast on 2 November 2012.

On 16 November 2012, the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust held a conference in La Mon Hotel focussing on the changes in medical and nursing practice throughout the years to which current and former members of staff were also invited. A range of speakers charted the founding of the Ulster Hospital and the evolution of the services provided today.

A nursing conference is planned for the New Year and a committee is currently discussing other events such as a Ball and a Family Day.

Welfare Reform: Projected Costs

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether his Department has any plans to undertake an assessment of the projected costs to health and social care as a result of the implementation of the welfare reforms; and to outline these assessments.

(AQW 17689/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department is currently considering what the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit alongside other Welfare Reform changes will be on health and social care services. My officials will continue to liaise with their counterparts in the Department for Social Development and with their counterparts in Great Britain to assess any potential implications for services and patients.

Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service: Uniforms

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what steps are being taken to ensure that the existing level of stock of new uniforms required by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service is sufficient to meet the expected number of new recruits within the next three months.

(AQW 17716/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service is confident that it has sufficient stock of safety critical uniform and Personal Protection Equipment to allow the next trainee course to commence.

A full sizing exercise of the trainees will be completed, which could result in the need to order further stock of non-safety critical uniform.

Missed Appointments: Community Transport

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many hospital appointments have been cancelled in the last twelve months because of the withdrawal of community transport in rural areas.

(AQW 17741/11-15)

Mr Poots: The provision of community transport in rural areas is a matter for the Department for Regional Development and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the level of community transport available. However, my Department understands that community transport providers do not transport patients to hospital appointments so no patient will have missed an appointment due to the unavailability of community transport.

Meningitis B Vaccine

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to introduce the Meningitis B vaccine which was recently approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

(AQW 17768/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vaccination policy in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK is guided by the recommendations of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), an independent expert advisory committee that advises the four UK Health Ministers on matters relating to the provision of vaccination and immunisation services. JCVI consider all the available medical and scientific evidence before recommending which vaccines should be offered.

The JCVI has begun an evaluation of the impact and cost effectiveness of possible Meningitis B vaccination strategies. The evaluation required is a highly complex analysis and final JCVI advice is not expected until 2013. I will consider the JCVI recommendation once it has been received.

Electrophysiological Studies: Craigavon Area Hospital

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action the Southern Health and Social Care Trust is taking to reduce the waiting list for electrophysiological studies in Craigavon Hospital from its current position of fifty two weeks.

(AQW 17786/11-15)

Mr Poots: I am advised by the Southern Health and Social Care Trust that Craigavon Area Hospital will be commencing additional sessions in January 2013 for patients to have electrophysiological (EP) studies. The Trust is also seeking to secure additional capacity from the Independent Sector for this service. I understand that 1 patient was waiting 48 weeks for an EP test at 10 December 2012.

Department of Justice

Colin Bell: Death in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will provide a copy of the review pursuant to the death in custody of Colin Bell on 1 August 2008, even in a redacted format.

(AQW 17044/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): A copy of the report has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16398/11-15, (i) to provide the timeline for the release and return to custody of this prisoner; (ii) whether the prisoner spent time in the Prisoner Assessment Unit or other pre-release facility; and (iii) how long he spent in that facility before he was released.

(AQW 17146/11-15)

Mr Ford: In line with Phase 3 of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Pre-release Programme, Mr Douglas had been residing in the community on a full time basis, subject to the supervision of a Community Probation Officer, since 23 April 2012. He was returned to the custody of Maghaberry Prison on 28 October 2012.

Mr Douglas did not spend any time in the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

Prisoners: False Names

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16110/11-15, on how many occasions in each of the last five years a (i) remand; and (ii) sentenced prisoner has been found to have entered each prison facility under a false name. (AQW 17147/11-15)

Mr Ford: Information in the form requested is not readily available and could only be obtained / compiled at disproportionate cost.

Prisoner Welcome Packs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what is the annual cost of the Prisoner Welcome Packs in each prison facility. (AQW 17175/11-15)

Mr Ford: The annual cost of Prisoner Welcome Packs for the most recent full financial year of 2011/12 was £3,935 in Maghaberry and £2,172 in Hydebank Wood. There was no cost for Welcome Packs in Magilligan as it is not a committal prison and receives its intake from the other two establishments.

Limavady Courthouse: Improvement Costs

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice to detail the estimated costs of improving Limavady Courthouse so that it meets the standard required to remain open. (AQW 17202/11-15)

Mr Ford: The recent estimated figures for improvement costs for Limavady Courthouse are as follows:

Building work	Electrical work	Mechanical work
£163,560	£70,800	£76,200

Prisons: Rehabilitation Programmes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what rehabilitation courses are available for the prison population. (AQW 17205/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) recognises that effective resettlement and rehabilitation is a key element in reducing the risk of reoffending.

NIPS, in partnership with its Multi Agency and Departmental partners, have developed 'The Pathways Interim Framework'. The model identifies a total of nine key pathways which, if effectively addressed, will contribute to a reduction in offending behaviour and to the successful rehabilitation of offenders. The nine pathways are:

- 1 Accommodation;
- 2 Education, Training and Employment;
- 3 Health – Mental and Physical;
- 4 Drugs and Alcohol;
- 5 Finance, Benefits and Debt;
- 6 Children and Families;
- 7 Attitudes, Thinking and Behaviours;
- 8 Supporting offenders who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence; and
- 9 Supporting offenders who have been involved in prostitution.

A comprehensive list of the programmes available is included at Annex 1.

PATHWAY 1 – Accommodation ANNEX 1

- Housing Rights Service
- ThruCare Pre-Release Programme
- NIACRO Welfare Advice – Benefits, Housing and Debt
- Extern Floating Support Project

PATHWAY 2 – Education, Training and Employment

- NIACRO Jobtrack
- Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme
- ThruCare Pre-Release Programme
- Extern Recycle
- Extern Pre Release Assessment Scheme

PATHWAY 3 – Health, Mental and Physical

- Acupuncture
- Art Therapy
- Samaritan's Listener Scheme Support HEARTMATH
- Cruse Bereavement Care

PATHWAY 4 – Drugs and Alcohol

- AD:EPT (comprehensive drug and alcohol service)
- Alcohol Management
- Alcohol Related Violence Programme
- Basic Substance Awareness Programme
- Drug Education Awareness Programme
- Combined Substance Programme
- Core Harm Reduction

PATHWAY 5 - Finance, Benefit and Debt

- NIACRO Welfare Advice – Benefits, Housing and Debt
- Money Management Programme
- ThruCare Pre-Release Programme

PATHWAY 6 - Children, Families and Communities

- Barnardo's Parenting Matters Being a Dad
- Barnardo's Partners Together
- Barnardo's Parents on release
- Barnardo's Talking to Children about Tough Issues
- Barnardo's Parenting
- Barnardo's Staying in Touch
- NIACRO Services – Family
- Prison Fellowship NI – Supporting Families
- Baby Massage
- The Big Book Share

PATHWAY 7 – Attitudes, Thinking and behaviours

- Motivational Enhancement Group (MEG)
- Gaining Opportunities & Living Skills (GOALS)
- Gaining Opportunities & Living Skills (GOALS) Support
- Controlling Anger and Learning to Manage it (CALM)
- Alcohol Related Violence Programme (ARV)
- Cognitive Self-Change Programme
- Enhanced thinking Skills (ETS)
- Enhanced thinking Skills Booster Programme (ETS Booster)
- Think First
- Safer Lives (for young offenders)
- CORE Sex Offender Treatment Programme (CORE)
- ROLLING Sex Offender Treatment Programme (ROLLING)
- Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) Programme

PATHWAY 8 - Supporting offenders who have been abused, raped or who have experienced domestic violence

The Women's Strategy identifies a need to work with specialist services to provide greater support for those women (and men), both in custody and in the community, with emotional needs related to issues such as domestic violence, rape and abuse. NEXUS are also contacted to provide counselling for sexual / violence abuse. NIPS is working in partnership with PBNI and DOJ in relation to this issue, including exploring how the Service can better collaborate with specialist organisations working in this field, as well as with the wider women's community sector.

PATHWAY 9 - Supporting offenders who have been involved in prostitution

As well as the services listed under all other Pathways, The Women's Strategy also identifies a need to work with specialist services to provide greater support for those women, both in custody and in the community, with needs related to their involvement in prostitution.

Magherafelt Courthouse: Closure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the closure of Magherafelt Court House, how does he intend to address the issue of it being in the Londonderry County Court Division, as all cases dealt with there arise in that divisional area, and any crown cases are moved to Londonderry Crown Court for hearing, when he intends to move cases originally destined for Magherafelt to Antrim Magistrates Court, which is outside the Londonderry County Court Division and the corresponding policing district.

(AQW 17213/11-15)

Mr Ford: Magherafelt Courthouse will not be closed until after the implementation of a single jurisdiction for magistrates' and county court business anticipated by April 2014.

Current policing district boundaries are not co-terminous with court boundaries.

Designated Smoking Areas

Lord Morrow asked Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 14948/11-15 whether he will consider introducing unannounced audits or inspections in relation to this matter.

(AQW 17215/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not intend to make any changes to the current arrangements.

Prisoner Held in HMP Maghaberry Under a False Name

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 16110/11-15 in relation to this particular prisoner under his accurate identity (i) for what conviction was he jailed and for how long; (ii) did he have similar offences on his correct record; and (iii) would his correct previous record have affected the durations of his sentence in this specific case.

(AQW 17216/11-15)

Mr Ford: The prisoner's previous record would not influence his time in custody as he was being held on remand. However, both records had already been merged by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

There was one previous sentence of four months for a similar offence.

Prison Service: Tuck Shop

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice with the exception of confectionery and tobacco products, what other items are available from Prison Service tuck shops per facility.

(AQW 17217/11-15)

Mr Ford: Excluding confectionery and tobacco products, the table below provides information on the range of stock items available for prisoners to purchase from the Tuck Shops at each establishment.

Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood
Batteries	Batteries	Batteries
Audio/Electrical	Audio/Electrical	Audio/Electrical
Groceries	Groceries	Groceries
Handicrafts	Handicrafts	Handicrafts
Food storage containers	Flasks/storage containers	Flasks/storage containers
Health food items	Health food items	Health food items
Laundry items	Laundry items	Laundry items

Maghaberry	Magilligan	Hydebank Wood
Stamps/stationery	Stamps/stationery	Stamps/stationery
Greeting cards	Greetings cards	Greetings cards
Toiletries	Toiletries	Toiletries
Pet food		Fruit

The availability of goods in each tuck shop is in line with the expectations included in Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons Expectation document. This document states that prisoners should have access to a wide range of products which are comparable in range and cost to those in a local supermarket.

In addition to these items, a limited selection of items is available for prisoners to purchase through a range of catalogues.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Misconduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, from 2000 to date, to detail (i) whether any Northern Ireland Prison Service Staff were suspended for gross misconduct and later granted ill-health retirement on the recommendation of the Prison Service; (ii) the date of each dismissal and retirement; (iii) the nature of the gross misconduct; (iv) any criminal convictions, court proceedings or informal police action taken; and (v) the level of staff involved in each case.

(AQW 17250/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold any records in relation to staff suspended for alleged gross misconduct and subsequently granted ill-health retirement.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16398/11-15, the offences for which the prisoner has been charged.

(AQW 17266/11-15)

Mr Ford: Kenneth Douglas has been charged with 12 offences that include false imprisonment, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, theft, possession of class A drugs and taking and driving away.

Electricity Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail his Department's electricity costs in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 17291/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) came into existence on 12 April 2010.

Electricity costs for the DOJ, including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, for the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12, and the current financial year up to the end of October 2012 are shown in the table below:

2012/13 (April to October 2012)	2011/12	2010/11
£1,310,651.90	£2,481,642.97	£2,309,547.81

Limavady Courthouse: Consultation

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice to detail the individuals and organisations in the Limavady area that responded to the consultation on the future of courthouses.

(AQW 17295/11-15)

Mr Ford: There were 11 responses to the Hearing Centre consultation from individuals and organisations in the Limavady area:

Alan Robinson	Councillor
David Gilmore	c/o DUP Constituency Office, Limavady
EAH Boyle	Private Individual
George Robinson	MLA East Londonderry
Gregory Campbell	MLA East Londonderry
James McCorkell	Councillor
Liam Flannigan	Chief Executive, Limavady Borough Council
Mr JE Scott	Private Individual

Peter Jack	Solicitors Association, Limavady
Philip Kingston	President, Roe Valley Chamber of Commerce
Secretary	DUP Constituency Office, Limavady

Drug Related Offences

Mrs McKeivitt asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of people convicted and prosecuted for drug related offences in each year since 2008, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 17311/11-15)

Mr Ford: Drug related offences may be prosecuted under a range of legislation including the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Medicines Act 1968 and the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979.

The table below gives the number convicted of drug related offences for the calendar years 2008 and 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available), based on the known address provided for the offender. It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2008 and 2009.

Number of convictions for drugs related offences by Parliamentary Constituency, 2008 – 2009

Parliamentary Constituency	2008	2009
Belfast East	31	42
Belfast North	77	100
Belfast South	48	46
Belfast West	71	92
East Antrim	41	38
East Londonderry	98	94
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	45	27
Foyle	51	54
Lagan Valley	30	21
Mid Ulster	35	49
Newry and Armagh	43	51
North Antrim	50	69
North Down	40	19
South Antrim	58	54
South Down	44	48
Strangford	27	23
Upper Bann	45	66
West Tyrone	43	31
Unknown	136	180
Total	1,013	1,104

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Absence Rates

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Justice how the current target absence rate for Prison Service Officers, of 10.3 days per year, compares with rates in England, Scotland and Wales.

(AQW 17327/11-15)

Mr Ford: As the information requested relates to Prison Services outside this jurisdiction, I would suggest that you address these matters directly with the relevant Departments involved.

Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) what level of Prison Service staff are responsible for completing Supporting Prisoner at Risk; (ii) who has access to the SPAR records; and (iii) what guidelines determine when a case is closed.

(AQW 17336/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) Any member of staff working with a prisoner can commence the Supporting Prisoners at Risk (SPAR) process. Responsibility for the ongoing management of the process is fulfilled at Senior Prison Officer level.
- (ii) The SPAR booklet which records the daily management of the prisoner must accompany the prisoner at all times; therefore all staff who have direct contact with the prisoner will have access to the SPAR booklet. SPAR data is also captured on the Prison Record Information System (PRISM). Staff with direct contact with the prisoner, and senior managers in the prison establishment will have access to the electronic PRISM records. Staff in the Safer Custody Branch at Prison Service headquarters also have access to these PRISM records on a read only basis.
- (iii) A SPAR is closed when agreement is reached at a multi-disciplinary case conference.

Non-natural Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16393/11-15, with the exception of the one stated case of suicide, whether the 12 remaining cases are regarded as suicide and whether the outcome of each case is subject to challenge.

(AQW 17339/11-15)

Mr Ford: When a death in custody occurs the Coroner advises the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) of the inquest verdict. Further information relating to these cases should be sought from the Coroner's Office as NIPS is unable to comment on the Coroner's decision.

Code of Conduct and Discipline: Approval by Secretary of State

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to 16541/11-15 and the responses to AQW 12701/11-15 and AQW 13722/11-15, whether he can confirm that the Prison Service's Code of Conduct and Discipline was not legally approved by the Secretary of State, as required by Rule 6 of the Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (Northern Ireland) 1995.

(AQW 17340/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to the responses previously provided, and in particular my response to AQW 12701/11-15. This confirmed that the minute from the Secretary of State's Office approved the Code of Conduct and Discipline in line with Rule 6 of The Prison and Young Offenders Centre Rules (Northern Ireland).

Courthouse Closures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the closure of four courthouses, for an estimate of the percentage of cases that will now be dealt with outside their respective County Court area each year.

(AQW 17341/11-15)

Mr Ford: The closure of the Hearing Centres will not result in any cases being dealt with outside their respective County Court area.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16241/11-15, to detail (i) the training, in terms of investigative techniques, skills and procedures, provided by the Northern Ireland Prison Service to each governor and principal officer involved in the investigation; (ii) when and where the training took place and its duration; (iii) who provided the training; and (iv) to provide a copy of the Terms of Reference for the investigation.

(AQW 17344/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Governors involved in this investigation were authorised by the

Northern Ireland Prison Service to conduct the investigation in accordance with the requirements of the Code of Conduct and Discipline (COCD), and were assisted by two Principal Officers. No specific training was provided.

A redacted copy of the Terms of Reference is attached.

Body Scanners: Cost

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice for an estimate of the cost of purchasing wave scanners for the Prison Estate if the pilot scheme is a success.

(AQW 17385/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently evaluating millimetre wave body scanning search technology and has leased two machines from two different suppliers. The evaluation process will not be completed until January 2013 and I am currently unable to assess whether this technology is appropriate for use in the prison environment.

The indicative costs of the equipment currently being tested range from £100,000 to £110,000 per unit, with support costs in the region of £8500 per unit after the initial year. There will also be a training cost for operators of up to £3000 per site.

These figures should be viewed as indicative only and have not been subject to NIPS procurement procedures which may change the overall costs.

Prison Officers: Security Threat

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice (i) for his assessment of the correlation between the security threat to prison officers and their level of sickness absence; and (ii) what action he is taking to reassure security personnel about their safety. (AQW 17386/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) While it is not possible to assess the extent to which a correlation exists between the security threat to prison officers and their levels of sickness absence, I have acknowledged publicly that the sickness absence levels within NIPS reflects the particular nature of the stresses and conditions of the role these NIPS staff perform.
- (ii) I continue to receive updates on meetings held between Prison Service officials and PSNI regarding the security of prison officers. All relevant staff are made fully aware of the security situation and measures have been put in place to reassure staff. As you can appreciate it would not be appropriate for me to place specific details of the security measures being made available to prison staff within the public domain.

Counterfeit Goods

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice what plans he has to work with the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to reduce the smuggling of counterfeit goods. (AQW 17387/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Chair of the Organised Crime Task force (OCTF), I can advise that intellectual property crime is one of the major organised crime threats. The OCTF has a dedicated Intellectual Property Crime (IPC) sub-group which acts as a forum for law enforcement agencies and business partners to develop strategies to deal with issues associated with intellectual property crime, including the smuggling of counterfeit goods. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment is represented on the IPC sub-group.

Courthouse Closures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Judiciary, particularly District Judges, on the closure of courthouses and hearing centres. (AQW 17411/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) presented the Hearing Centre closure proposals to members of the Judiciary for discussion. They were also discussed at the NICTS Agency Board which includes judicial attendees.

Copies of the Hearing Centre closure consultation document were issued to the Lord Chief Justice, Lords Justice of Appeal, High Court Judges and the representative Judicial bodies.

I also mentioned the Hearing Centre Closure proposals to the Lord Chief Justice.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in light of the report into incidents at the Prisoner Assessment Unit and the subsequent closure of the Unit and disciplinary action against staff, what changes have been made to the guidance of the Unit's running, to ensure that similar errors do not occur when it is reopened; and whether any of the original staff will be returning to their posts. (AQW 17412/11-15)

Mr Ford: Further to my statement to the Assembly on 26 November, I can confirm that a project team comprising of officials from the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS), the Department of Justice and the Probation Board for Northern Ireland has been established to develop proposals on how best to operate and manage the proposed Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) on the Crumlin Road.

This team will take into account the recommendations of a number of recent reports, including the Criminal Justice Inspectorate Northern Ireland (CJINI) review of the management of life and indeterminate sentence prisoners in Northern Ireland (July 2012); the Prison Review Team report (February 2012); and the internal NIPS review of the working of the PAU (October 2011), and will consider a range of issues including the deployment of staff.

Kenneth Douglas

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16398/11-15, what are the nature of the charges; and whether any application has been made for bail.

(AQW 17413/11-15)

Mr Ford: Kenneth Douglas has been charged with 12 offences that include false imprisonment, assault occasioning actual bodily harm, theft, possession of class A drugs and taking and driving away.

Mr Douglas has not made any application for bail.

Rape: Youths and Juveniles Charged

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many youths or juveniles are within the court system who are charged with rape, broken down by court division; and how many are remanded in custody or are on bail.

(AQW 17414/11-15)

Mr Ford: As at 5 December there were eight youths within the court system on rape charges. The breakdown by Court Division and status of the defendant is set out below:

County Court Division	Bail	Custody	Summons	Total
Antrim	1	0	1	2
Ards	1	1*	0	2
Belfast	2	1	0	3
Fermanagh & Tyrone	1	0	0	1

* Appeal case – defendant currently in custody pending appeal.

Fuel Smuggling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what more his Department can do to tackle fuel smuggling.

(AQW 17422/11-15)

Mr Ford: Fuel smuggling is primarily an excise offence and therefore an excepted matter that falls to HMRC. Nevertheless it is an area which the Organised Crime Task Force, of which I am the chair, considers.

In addition, the OCTF Cross Border Fuel Fraud Enforcement Group meets on a regular basis to share information; plan joint operations; and discuss new methods of addressing the issues related to all types of fuel fraud. The group is currently involved in the development of a new fuel marker aimed at preventing fuel laundering. It is anticipated this will be introduced in summer 2013.

My Department will be consulting in the New Year on legislation to enable sentences for the offence of evasion of duty, which includes fuel smuggling, to be referred to the Court of Appeal if the Director of Public Prosecutions regards them as unduly lenient.

Cigarette Smuggling

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice what more his Department can do to tackle cigarette smuggling.

(AQW 17423/11-15)

Mr Ford: Tackling the issue of smuggled cigarettes is primarily a matter for HMRC and UK Border Force. In 2011/12, these organisations seized over 23 million counterfeit and smuggled cigarettes in Northern Ireland.

Under the auspices of the OCTF, which I chair, law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border were brought together to form a Cross Border Tobacco Fraud Enforcement Group. The aim of the group is to identify key criminal gangs involved in this activity and to use a partnership approach to ensure they are disrupted.

In addition, my Department will be consulting on legislation to enable referral to the Court of Appeal of sentences for the offence of evasion of duty which the Director of Public Prosecutions considers to be unduly lenient.

Forensic Laboratories: Backlog

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice, following the criticism from a Derry magistrate on the time taken to get samples analysed and reports completed, what he is doing to address the backlog of cases in forensic laboratories.

(AQW 17429/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the Magistrates' Court case referred to, all examinations requested from Forensic Science Northern Ireland (FSNI) were reported within the agreed timescales, prior to the Court hearing.

FSNI liaises closely with the Public Prosecution Service to ensure reports are available for court hearings. FSNI issues approximately 9000 reports a year: the current number outstanding to the PPS is 14.

Prostitution: Prosecutions and Convictions

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for offences relating to prostitution in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17470/11-15)

Mr Ford: During the period in question, offences relating to prostitution were prosecuted under Sections 13 and 13(1) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885, Sections 52 and 53(1) Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Section 167 of the Belfast Improvement Act 1845.

The table below gives the number prosecuted and convicted for the calendar years 2004 -2006 and the number convicted for the calendar years 2007 – 2009 (the latest year for which figures are currently available). It is not possible to provide prosecution data for 2007 to 2009.

Number of prosecutions and convictions for prostitution offences 2004 – 2009

Year	Prosecutions	Convictions
2004	2	2
2005	3	3
2006	0	0
2007	N/A	5
2008	N/A	5
2009	N/A	3

Data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Courts: Interpreter Costs

Mr Dallat asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost of using interpreters for court cases, including accommodation and travel, in each of the last two years.

(AQW 17492/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the cost of court interpreter and document translation services, including travel and accommodation, for the last two financial years:

Interpreter Costs	Total (£)
1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011	475,784.81
1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012	625,372.83
Total (£)	1,101,157.64

Bangor Courthouse: Maintenance

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether he can give an assurance that Bangor Courthouse will not be allowed to fall into dereliction and become a hub for anti-social behaviour once it ceases to operate as a court facility in April 2013.

(AQW 17529/11-15)

Mr Ford: My Department will continue to retain responsibility for ensuring that Bangor Courthouse is appropriately maintained and secure until such times as it is disposed of.

Royal Ulster Constabulary Part-time Reserve Gratuity

Mr McClarty asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to reopen applications for the Royal Ulster Constabulary Part-Time Reserve gratuity scheme to make use of the £392,000 surplus funds.

(AQW 17641/11-15)

Mr Ford: While I sympathise with those who have missed the deadline for various reasons, the Gratuity payment was an ex gratia payment. Due to the terms of the Scheme there had to be a deadline as the value of each payment was dependent on the number of verified applications. The onus had to be with applicants to ensure their application was made within the deadline. Therefore I am unable to reopen the scheme to allow late applications.

This residue will be retained until the Department is confident that no further payments may be made. No decisions have yet been taken on how the residue can and should be used.

Bangor Courthouse: Upgrade Cost

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice whether an assessment was made as to the cost of upgrading Bangor courthouse to the standard required for it to remain in use, and if so, to outline the cost.

(AQW 17647/11-15)

Mr Ford: A Condition Survey and a Disability Discrimination Act Survey carried out on Bangor Courthouse recommended improvements at estimated costs of £364,000.

Department for Regional Development

'Welcome to Northern Ireland' Signs

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether all the 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' signs along the border which were stolen or vandalised have been replaced; and to state the reasons if any have not been replaced.

(AQW 17268/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): I can advise the Member that all the "Welcome to Northern Ireland" signs erected by Roads Service along the border, which were stolen or vandalised have been replaced.

'Welcome to Northern Ireland' Signs

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development whether anyone has been made amenable for the theft and criminal damage of 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' signs along border roads.

(AQW 17269/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: There have been no prosecutions in relation to the theft and vandalism of 'Welcome to Northern Ireland' signs.

It is an offence under Article 33 of the Road Traffic (NI) Order 1981 for a person to unlawfully and intentionally interfere with or damage a traffic sign and anyone caught doing so will be prosecuted. Where there have been incidents of sign theft, these have been reported to the PSNI, however, the Member will appreciate the courts require substantial and clear evidence before a successful prosecution can be brought.

Roads Service will continue to identify damaged or missing signs as part of its routine inspections, which will be prioritised for replacement or repair as necessary.

Pond Park Road, Lisburn

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the work being carried out by the Roads Service and the Rivers Agency at Pond Park Road and Pond Park Road East, Lisburn.

(AQW 17272/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised a scheme was recently completed to prevent water discharging onto Pond Park Road. The scheme involved construction of a new manhole and cleaning of the existing back channels. In addition, Roads Service officials also met with an adjacent landowner as water was discharging onto the road from his field. I understand that the landowner has subsequently carried out remedial work that is intended to prevent future reoccurrences.

Roads Service officials have further advised that since these work has been completed, no further flooding has taken place during periods of heavy rainfall.

Gritting: Savings

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the savings his Department made in the purchasing of grit as a result of the mild winter in 2011/2012.

(AQW 17275/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have assumed that the Member's question relates to rock salt, which is the primary material used in Roads Service's winter service programme.

I can advise that in 2011/12 Roads Service used approximately 48,000 tonnes of salt. This represents a saving of approximately 49,000 tonnes compared with the average of around 97,000 tonnes a year during the period 2008/09 to 2010/11, and a saving of approximately 5,000 tonnes compared with the 10 year average of 53,000 tonnes per year, in the period prior to 2008/09.

Unfortunately for reasons of commercial sensitivity and in the interests of securing best value for money in future procurement exercises, I am unable to provide you with specific information on the savings achieved.

Compensation Claims: Lagan Valley

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how many compensation claims his Department has received from drivers whose vehicles have been damaged as a result of the condition of the roads in the Lagan Valley area in the last year. (AQW 17276/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that it does not record information on claims for compensation on a constituency basis. However, the geographical area covered by Lisburn and Banbridge Section Offices is similar to the Lagan Valley constituency area. I can advise that in the 2011/12 financial year, 181 claims for vehicle damage were received in the Lisburn and Banbridge Section Office areas.

Posters and Signs

Mr Craig asked the Minister for Regional Development how his Department plans to reduce the number of posters and signs that are erected illegally. (AQW 17277/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the illegal erection of advertising signs along the public road is an offence under The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993. Article 87 of the Order, deals with advertisements, pictures, signs, etc, unlawfully affixed to the surface of a road, or any tree, structure or other works in or on a road, that is, signs on Roads Service property.

In addition, Article 21(1) of the Order states that "any person who erects or exhibits or causes or permits to be erected or exhibited any advertisement or notice which is sited or designed wholly or mainly for the purpose of being visible to persons using a special road or which is likely to prejudice the safety of traffic using a special road shall be guilty of an offence and liable under summary conviction to a fine". All motorways and the Westlink are examples of special roads.

Where an advertising hoarding is erected illegally on Roads Service property or adjacent to special roads, action is taken by Roads Service to try and remove these under Articles 87 & 21 respectively of the Roads (NI) order 1993. The Department may subsequently seek to recover costs, as appropriate.

Foyle Constituency

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Regional Development how his budget will benefit the Foyle constituency up until the end of this Assembly mandate, broken down by the allocation of funds. (AQW 17279/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The following table details my Department's resource and capital budget up until the end of this Assembly mandate.

Table 1

	2012-13		2013-14		2014-15	
	Resource £m	Capital £m	Resource £m	Capital £m	Resource £m	Capital £m
Roads	229.9	194.4	197.4	268.0	195.0	222.1
Transport	102.2	52.2	71.4	18.1	70.1	29.7
EU Structural Funds	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.3
Water and Sewerage	171.1	164.4	181.6	165.7	180.3	163.8
Total	503.2	410.0	450.4	451.9	445.5	415.9

Note: Totals may not add due to rounding.

My Department and its arm's-length bodies, Northern Ireland Water (NIW) and Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company (NITHC), do not maintain detailed analysis of spend on a parliamentary constituency basis.

Roads Service

Roads Service maintenance expenditure is allocated on the basis of need using a range of weighted indicators tailored to each maintenance activity. Divisions use these indicators when apportioning funding across council areas to ensure, as far as possible, an equitable distribution of funds across the whole of Northern Ireland.

The priority and advancement of the schemes within the major roads programme and other capital works are assessed and prioritised taking into account a range of criteria.

The table below details the major road improvements that are planned in the North West region during the current Assembly mandate.

Table 2

	2012-13 £m	2013-14 £m	2014-15 £m	Total Project Cost £m	Estimated Completion Date
A5 Londonderry to North of Strabane and A5 South of Omagh to Ballygawley*	64	119	100	330	2015/16

* Dependant on outcome of legal challenge.

I would also advise you of the availability of my Department's Roads Service report to Londonderry City Council which highlights in greater detail the schemes undertaken in 2011-2012 and planned works for the 2012-2013 year, the link to which is provided below.

www.drndni.gov.uk/index/publications/publications-details.htm?docid=8032

Northern Ireland Water (NIW)

NIW's capital and resource budgets are set at an overall budget allocation level reflecting the fact that DRD sets overall programme priorities and does not control individual projects.

The table below sets out the proposed water programmes in the Foyle Area. The investment levels and project numbers for 2013-14 and 2014-15 are indicative and will be determined by the Utility Regulator through the ongoing regulatory price control process for water (PC13).

Table 3

	2012-13 £000	2013-14 £000	2014-15 £000	Total Project Cost £000	Estimated Completion Date
Carmoney Water Treatment Works Upgrade	109	0	0	5,226	2012/13
Glengalliagh Pumping Station and Pumping Main	12	9	0	4,615	2015/16
Ardan Road Culmore Foul and Storm Sewer Extension	87	0	0	94	2012/13
Londonderry DAP: Work packages	1,785	900	0	16,250	2013/14
Bank Place, Londonderry Sewer	59	0	0	68	2012/13
Strathfoyle, Londonderry Siphon Inlet Screen	1,197	0	0	1,408	2012/13
Maydown WWPS Replacement	126	0	0	259	2012/13
Carmoney to Strabane Strategic Link Watermain	11	0	0	8,703	2016/17
Major Incident Mitigation Project North Region Freeze Thaw Improvements	381	1,315		1,837	2012/13
Lone Moor Road, Londonderry Storm Sewer Extension	500	0	0	696	2012/13
Culmore WWTW's Phase 2 Base Maintenance	192	444	0	636	2013/14
Circular Road, Londonderry Storm sewer extension	242	307	0	564	2013/14
Donnybrewer WWTW's Phase 2 Base Maintenance	91	408	0	497	12/13
Tobermore WWTW Upgrade	321	0	0	426	2012/13
Maydown WWPS Replacement	126	0	0	259	2012/13
Faughan Crescent WWPS, Londonderry. Pumping station and pumping main upgrade	11	120	6	137	2014/15
Magheramason WWTWs	13	700	800	1,523	2014/15
Tamnaherin WWTW Feasibility Study	991	0	0	1,367	2012/13
Nixons Corner, Londonderry WWTW Feasibility Study	10	1,000	200	1,240	2014/15
Forecast Total	6,264	5,203	1,006	45,805	

Transport

It is not possible to identify resource expenditure for public transport for the Foyle constituency, as expenditure does not relate to an individual constituency. The Department has provided and will continue to provide funding for public transport services and initiatives, including transport services for people with disabilities and concessionary fares, throughout the country, which although used by residents in the Foyle constituency, are not specific to that constituency.

The projects listed in the table below are directly relevant to the Foyle area, but Foyle also benefits from general rail and bus projects. The entire Translink network benefits from the impact of the New Trains project and the new Goldline vehicles and provision of Wi-Fi on both Goldline vehicles and trains. The Translink figures below are estimates and are subject to change.

Table 4

	2012-13 £000	2013-14 £000	2014-15 £000	Total Project Cost £000	Estimated Completion Date
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Relay Phase 1	17,900	0	0	22,300	2012/13
Coleraine to Londonderry Track Relay Phase 2	1,700	3,500	14,700	19,900	2015/16
Coleraine to Londonderry line track safety improvement works	1,400	0	0	4,700	2012/13
Bann Bridge Coleraine Refurbishment Works	2,800	0	500	3,500	2012/13
User Worked Crossing Reconfiguration Brolleys/McConaghys	700	400	0	1,100	2013/14
Forecast Total	24,500	3,900	15,200	51,500	

Electricity Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail his Department's electricity costs in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 17290/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Department's electricity costs in each of the last three financial years are detailed in the table below.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Total (£000's)	9,445	11,347	11,995

The majority of the Department's electricity costs relate to non-accommodation charges, for example traffic signs, signals and street lighting.

Waterside Car Park, Coleraine

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) how much revenue the Waterside Car Park in Coleraine has generated since it became a pay and display car park; and (ii) whether the revenue raised correlates with the projected revenue.

(AQW 17296/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that some £12,000 has been generated from the Waterside Car Park in Coleraine since it became pay and display in July 2012.

Roads Service does not have projected revenue figures for specific car parks, as revenue is dependent on the level of usage which can fluctuate. However, I can confirm that since the introduction of pay and display at Waterside Car Park, the indications are that there has been a significant reduction in all-day parking, resulting in a higher turnover of parking spaces. This helps to keep the most convenient spaces available for shoppers, or other visitors, with the aim of helping the vitality and viability of town centres.

Waterside Car Park, Coleraine

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Regional Development how much it cost to install car parking meters in the Waterside Car Park, Coleraine.

(AQW 17297/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the cost of providing the Pay and Display machines, including associated works and signage, at the Waterside car-park in Coleraine is approximately £25,000.

Carlingford Lough: Proposed Bridge

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what role his Department will have in the construction and planning of the proposed road bridge across Carlingford Lough.

(AQW 17372/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: While my Department has no direct involvement in this project, nor has it made any commitment to contribute funds to the scheme, I understand that my Department's Roads Service officials have worked with the scheme development team. These deliberations have focussed on resolving issues relating to the potential for queues to build up on the approaches to Narrow Water Roundabout if installed, when the bridge is closed to road traffic and open for navigation purposes.

In the meantime, Roads Service is continuing to work on the Newry Southern Relief Road proposal, which would provide a strategic link between the A2 Warrenpoint dual carriageway and the A1 Belfast to Dublin Road.

EU Funding: Infrastructure Projects

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans his Department has to apply for EU funding for road and water infrastructure projects.

(AQW 17376/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Across my Department this year, applications have been submitted for EU funding towards the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay, the ecars project, the York Street Interchange feasibility study, the redevelopment of Portadown Railway Station and the procurement of 53 new sustainable buses.

During the remainder of the current EU programme period, my Department hopes to apply for EU funding towards the A8 Belfast to Larne project, a feasibility study in relation to a Belfast Transport Hub and the next phase of the Coleraine to Londonderry track relay. However, the submission of applications will be dependent on the announcement of 'calls' by the managing authorities / European Commission and the nature of the call criteria.

My Department is also exploring EU funding options for the Belfast Rapid Transit Project and potential water related projects.

In addition, my Department is continuing to engage with Europe and the appropriate managing authorities to influence the next set of EU funding programmes to ensure they provide opportunities for transport, road and water infrastructure projects. Until there is more clarity on the programmes' regulations and the availability of national and regional budgets, definitive details of my Department's plans to apply for EU funding in the next programme period cannot be provided.

A5: Link Road to New Hospital

Mr McAleer asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 16346/11-15, to outline his plans to extend the proposed link road from the Bankmore Road/Crevenagh Road roundabout to the existing A5.

(AQW 17394/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that I plan to meet with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to discuss the potential for both our Departments to work together, to explore the possibility of delivering the proposed link road from Bankmore Road/Crevenagh Road to the existing A5.

I am unable to make any comment in relation to the proposed link road, or the manner in which this could be achieved, until this meeting has taken place.

Grit Boxes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department intends to increase the number of grit boxes in the North Down area.

(AQW 17495/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service provides salt bins for use by the public, on a self help basis, on roads which do not qualify for inclusion in the salting schedule, and where the following criteria are met:

- the location in question is on the publicly maintained road network;
- the gradient on the road in question exceeds 5%;
- no reasonable alternative route is available; and
- the subject road qualifies through an assessment process that considers factors such as road geometry, residential usage, community welfare and commercial usage.

There are no limits placed on the number of salt bins which may be provided. However, salt bins will not normally be provided within 100 metres of an existing salt bin.

There are currently 181 salt bins within the North Down Borough Council area. Roads Service will consider the provision of additional salt bins if requested by a member of the public and a suitable location for the bin is available.

Bus Service: Culmore Road, Derry

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Regional Development what action Translink has taken to establish a bus service on the Culmore Road, Derry.

(AQW 17510/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: This is an operational matter for Translink. However Translink has advised me that they have made several applications to DOE Licensing Division for a Road Service Licence to operate a bus service to Culmore Point. These applications have been unsuccessful.

Currently the Lough Swilly Bus Company operates a service part-funded from my Department's Rural Transport Fund along this route.

Hospital Appointments: Rural Community Transport

Mr McMullan asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of reinstating community transport in rural areas for hospital appointments.

(AQW 17559/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My response to AQW 9282/11-15 and AQW 12014/11-15 sets out my Department's position in regard to this issue. There has been no change to this approach. However you may be interested to learn that my Department is currently developing proposals to run a small pilot project in the Dungannon area in conjunction with the other Government bodies, including the Health Trusts that fund and deliver public transport services. It will examine the opportunities for a more joined up approach to the planning and delivery of publicly funded transport services.

Smart Card Technology: UK-wide Travel

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development what actions he has planned in regard to smartcard technology to enable people to move more freely and easily when travelling throughout the UK.

(AQW 17604/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department has recently authorized Translink to undertake a feasibility study into the options for a new ticketing system. Among the matters which the study will consider will be the technical and cost implications of making the new travel products compatible with the different smartcard systems being implemented in the various regions of the UK. The feasibility and implications of also using EMV (Europay MasterCard VISA) bank cards will be considered as part of the study, which is due to be completed by December 2013.

Department for Social Development

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by his Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16782/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development):

Year	Requests Received	Proportion of Requests Not Answered Within Time Limit
2007	200	13.5%
2008	174	2.3%
2009	164	3.0%
2010	183	2.2%
2011	224	22.3%
2012	227	27.3%

	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding
1-2 months	0
3-4 months	0
5-6 months	0

	Number of Requests Currently Outstanding
7-12 months	0
More than 12 months	1

Co-Ownership Housing: Applications

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of applications to the Co-Ownership Scheme for every month since January 2007 that were (i) approved; and (ii) not approved.

(AQW 17079/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total number of applications received and successfully supported by the Co-Ownership Scheme for each month since January 2007 are outlined in the attached table. Of the remainder that were unsuccessful, a significant number would have been approved after the initial processing of their application but ultimately were unable to complete. This can be for a number of reasons, for example; the vendor withdrew the property from sale or they were unable to secure an appropriate mortgage.

It should be noted that due to financial restrictions, the Co-Ownership Scheme closed during the period April to October 2008 and an applications quota was in place from April 2009 to September 2011.

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2007	27	16
Feb 2007	41	29
Mar 2007	69	55
Apr 2007	105	75
May 2007	174	122
Jun 2007	134	90
Jul 2007	111	66
Aug 2007	139	82
Sep 2007	140	88
Oct 2007	192	130
Nov 2007	176	118
Dec 2007	106	68

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2008	183	117
Feb 2008	334	140
Mar 2008	180	12
Apr 2008	n/a	n/a
May 2008	n/a	n/a
Jun 2008	n/a	n/a
Jul 2008	n/a	n/a
Aug 2008	n/a	n/a
Sep 2008	n/a	n/a
Oct 2008	n/a	n/a
Nov 2008	136	51
Dec 2008	49	18

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2009	54	23
Feb 2009	95	40
Mar 2009	255	94
Apr 2009	207	68
May 2009	176	25
Jun 2009	195	33
Jul 2009	137	39
Aug 2009	106	37
Sep 2009	76	24
Oct 2009	82	30
Nov 2009	80	24
Dec 2009	93	20

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2010	76	32
Feb 2010	61	28
Mar 2010	87	38
Apr 2010	99	37
May 2010	88	41
Jun 2010	92	52
Jul 2010	82	35
Aug 2010	80	42
Sep 2010	131	62
Oct 2010	165	101
Nov 2010	48	21
Dec 2010	70	16

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2011	92	23
Feb 2011	115	20
Mar 2011	141	24
Apr 2011	183	38
May 2011	160	40
Jun 2011	190	68
Jul 2011	93	45
Aug 2011	91	49
Sep 2011	122	65
Oct 2011	167	97
Nov 2011	121	63
Dec 2011	95	56

Month/Year	Total Received (Individual Applications)	Total Successful (Purchase Completed)
Jan 2012	91	51
Feb 2012	141	88
Mar 2012	156	82
Apr 2012	129	65
May 2012	162	68
Jun 2012	127	45
Jul 2012	144	10
Aug 2012	148	10
Sep 2012	118	1
Oct 2012	190	-
Total	7907	3247

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Double Glazing

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development how a saving of £15.1m arises from the proposed change of hinge type to be used in the Housing Executive double glazing scheme.

(AQW 17128/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Savings of £15.1m arises by changing the Housing Executive's requirement to fit windows from the inside and also hinges. By fitting from the inside a tenants decor is not disturbed negating the need to pay redecoration grants of an average £400-£450 per dwelling. With regard to the type of hinges used in the Housing Executive's double glazing programme, the estimated associated savings could be as much as £500k or higher. These savings can be used in other priority areas, such as new kitchens and heating schemes.

Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development whether reversible hinge windows can be installed from the outside in, negating the need for a redecoration grant; and whether this has been taken into consideration in his review of the Housing Executive double glazing installation scheme.

(AQW 17148/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that reversible hinge windows can be installed from either the inside or the outside dependent on the construction of the property. The saving on redecoration allowances is as a result of the minimum disturbance to the internal surfaces and decoration of the property irrespective of the installation method. This means that in the vast majority of cases regardless of which installation method is used a redecoration grant will not be needed.

Double Glazing

Mr McKay asked the Minister for Social Development what savings are associated with the proposed change in specification of the type of hinge used in the Housing Executive double glazing programme.

(AQW 17152/11-15)

Mr McCausland: With regard to the type of hinges used in the Housing Executive's double glazing programme, their preferred option now is to use casement type hinges in their low to medium rise stock and the estimated associated savings could be as much as £500k or even higher.

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008

Mr Wells asked the Minister for Social Development when charities will be required to register under the terms of the Charities Act (NI) 2008.

(AQW 17228/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Charities Bill will address a legal issue which has arisen regarding public benefit provisions within section 3 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008. This legal uncertainty has prevented the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) from initiating a local register of charities. It is expected that the Charities Bill will receive Royal Assent in early 2013.

This will enable CCNI to conduct public consultation on its draft public benefit guidance. CCNI then expects to commence the registration of charities in the autumn of 2013. The registration process will be completed on a phased basis and charities will be invited to come forward for registration by the Commission.

Universal Credit: Advice Services

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has identified a need for additional resources to support further advice services that can assist claimants during the transitional process to universal credit.

(AQW 17318/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department supports frontline advice services through its Community Support Programme which provides approximately £1.6 million annually to councils who add their own funding allocation, £1.9 million in 2012/13, and commission services for their local areas.

Regional support for advice is delivered by the Northern Ireland Advice Services Consortium – made up of Advice NI, Citizens Advice NI and Law Centre NI - with a funding contract from my Department of £3.5 million in place from 1 October 2012 to 31 March 2015. My officials are engaging with the Advice Services Consortium to discuss how the Department can work with the Advice Sector to best support our claimants through the implementation of Universal Credit, including any resourcing implications.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development how the £12 million boiler replacement scheme funding will be allocated over the remainder of this mandate; and how much of it has already been committed.

(AQW 17324/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The boiler replacement scheme commenced on 3rd September 2012. The £12m that has been allocated to the scheme will be spent at the rate of £4m per year for the three years to 2014/15. As at 3rd December just over £900K has been committed, however it is anticipated that the £4m allocated for this year will be spent by the year end due to the high interest in the scheme.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will consider reallocating any of the £12 million boiler replacement scheme funding to other fuel poverty initiatives, such as insulation restoration schemes in existing housing stock.

(AQW 17325/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The £12m that has been set aside by the Northern Ireland Executive for the boiler replacement scheme can only be used for replacing an inefficient boiler 15 years old or more for a more energy efficient condensing oil or gas boiler, switching from oil to gas, or switching to a wood pellet boiler. It cannot be allocated to other fuel poverty initiatives; however the Warm Homes Scheme offers a range of insulation measures to households receiving a qualifying benefit.

Boiler Replacement Scheme

Mrs Cochrane asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the number of applications that have been received for the boiler replacement scheme; (ii) the income ratio figures of those who have applied; and (iii) the number of applications that have been successful.

(AQW 17326/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There have been 21,000 applications issued and 8,498 received. The income ratio of applicants is 70% earn less than £20k with 30% earning between £20k and £39,999. Almost 1,200 approvals have been issued to date.

New Towns Commission: Ballymena and Antrim

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development how the covenants, that were issued by the Ballymena and Antrim New Town Commission, on the leases for ground were selected; and whether these covenants are deemed to be in breach of the Human Rights Act because of their restrictive nature.

(AQW 17350/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The terms and conditions imposed on leases relating to New Town Land were put in place to maintain an element of control over the use of the land in order to ensure that the 'new towns' of Antrim and Ballymena developed in accordance with the New Town Commissions' plans.

With regards to the extent to which such covenants comply with the Human Rights Act, I am unable to say as all such leases pre date this legislation and the legislation cannot be applied retrospectively. I can say however that my Department has previously acted reasonably when asked to remove or relax covenants on leases and will be happy to consider doing so again, if asked.

Single Room Rate: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in North Down will be affected by the introduction of the single room rate.

(AQW 17371/11-15)

Mr McCausland: On 1 January 2012 changes were introduced which increased the age criteria from 25 years to 34 years for single people who were limited to a single room rate (Shared Accommodation Rate) of the Local Housing Allowance. Claimants aged 25-34 in receipt of Housing Benefit before 1 January 2012 were protected from the changes until their next anniversary of their claim. Protection ends for all cases on the 31 December 2012.

The number of people affected in North Down is detailed in the table below: -

Council area	Claimants under 35yrs on SAR* at 31/10/12	Claimants aged 25-34 on SAR* at 31/10/12	Anticipated number of claimants (25-34) still to be affected by SAR* changes
North Down	198	122	19

* Shared Accommodation Rate

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive: Declarations of Unfitness, North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development how many declarations of unfitness have been issued by the Housing Executive in the North Down District over the last twelve months; and for what reason was each declaration issued.

(AQW 17486/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed that no declarations of unfitness have been issued by their Bangor District office, which covers the North Down area, over the last twelve months.

Public Sector Hub: Enniskillen

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has looked at the possibility of relocating (i) Enniskillen Jobs & Benefits Office; and (ii) Enniskillen Housing Executive Office to the proposed public sector hub on the old Erne Hospital site.

(AQW 17540/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency, in conjunction with colleagues in the Department for Employment and Learning, delivers social security and employment services in the current Jobs and Benefits location at the Crown Building, Queen Elizabeth Road, Enniskillen site. The Department of Trade and Investment Trading Standards also has a separate public office facility in the building. The Crown Building is owned by the Department of Finance and Personnel and has been significantly upgraded, both by my Department and the Department of Finance and Personnel, to enable the delivery of services by a number of Departments. This investment was seen as long term and any changes at this stage could undermine the benefits realisation and value for money aspects, as detailed in the business case. The Crown Building continues to meet the Department's accommodation requirements at this time.

Nevertheless, my Department has co-operated with the requests for information from the consultants engaged by Fermanagh Council to enable them to develop proposals for the Erne Hospital Site as a possible Public Centre Hub. Should any new solution of a shared site at the proposed Erne Hospital Site demonstrate value for money, then this would have to be considered by the Department of Finance and Personnel in its role in providing public sector accommodation to NICS Departments and by my Department in its role of providing a service to the community in Enniskillen.

The Housing Executive has advised that they expressed an interest in the shared facilities at the Erne Hospital site. They have provided the consultants with all the information requested and await an indication of the costs involved. They have made it clear that an economic appraisal would be required before seeking Housing Executive Board approval but they also have to take restructuring into consideration as well as the future of the Fermanagh District Office which they own. They remain interested but are unable to give a firm commitment at this time.

Window Replacement Scheme: Down

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Social Development, having considered representations made to him by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive office in Downpatrick, whether he will add UPVC doors to the UPVC window replacement scheme operating in Down District between October 2012 and February 2013.

(AQW 17592/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has confirmed that the scheme currently on site in Downpatrick is a window replacement scheme and there is no scope to include replacement of doors in this current scheme. An External Cyclical

Maintenance scheme is provisionally programmed for the Downpatrick area in 2014/15. Prior to the scheme commencing, a survey will be carried out and any external doors that require replacement will be included in the scheme.

Alcohol: Rough Sleeping

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is aware of any proven correlation between the availability of cheap alcohol and the number of people who are sleeping on the streets.

(AQW 17594/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is well documented that one of the factors associated with rough sleeping is alcohol and drug addiction. However there is no available evidence of a correlation between the availability of cheap alcohol and the number of people who sleep rough on the streets.

Procurement: Planned Schemes Framework

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development why the tender for a Planned Schemes Framework PPQ2030 only allows for large contractors to apply for maintenance contracts with the Housing Executive.

(AQW 17685/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive recently advertised its procurement exercise for the provision of a Planned Schemes Framework. This framework will replace the existing Revenue Replacement/External Maintenance Framework. The framework will be used to carry out planned maintenance to Housing Executive properties. This will include both residential and office accommodation for buildings below four storeys tall. The value of the procurement over the period of the framework is around £150m.

The framework is divided into six lots, each lot specific to a geographical area within Northern Ireland. The highest valued lot is valued at around £9.7m while the lowest is valued at around £3.9m. The forecast number of schemes that will be progressed in any given year, subject to budgetary provision, will be in the region of 130. It is also the Housing Executive's experience that of this total some 65 could be in progress at any given time.

In order to ensure that successful tenderers have the requisite capability and capacity to carry out the work the Housing Executive has set certain basic requirements within the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ). These requirements are set in accordance with regulations 23, 24 and 25 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended).

The financial element of the PQQ requires applicants to have a category value of no less than £3.4m. This is based on the fact that the Housing Executive's highest estimated valued lot is some £9.7m while the lowest is £3.9m. Based on the figure of 50% of schemes being in progress at any one time they further estimated that £4.85m and £1.95m of work in the highest and lowest lot could be in progress. In order to then obtain one category value the Housing Executive decided to obtain the average of these figures which was £3.4m.

It is clear that the setting of the Category Value was done as an objective factual exercise. The value was not set to discriminate against any part of the construction sector and the Housing Executive's procurement process is designed to be as open, fair and transparent as possible.

They aim, as a matter of course, to issue tenders that allow as many economic operators as possible to tender, irrespective of their size. The Housing Executive's Planned Schemes Framework Procurement is no different. However, they have built in the category value as a matter of best practice to ensure that only those contractors that have the capacity to carry out the work are considered.

Warm Homes Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development whether the current Warm Homes Scheme extends to topping up roofspace insulation, which was fitted under previous similar schemes.

(AQW 17715/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The current Warm Homes Scheme can include topping up roofspace insulation fitted under previous schemes where that insulation fails to meet the current building regulations.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 21 December 2012

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998: Exception of Teachers

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for their assessment of the 2004 Equality Commission report 'The Exception of Teachers from The Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998'; and of its recommendation that the exception of the recruitment of secondary school teachers from fair employment law and practice is stopped.
(AQW 14987/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): This is a policy issue under discussion between OFMDFM and DE, who share responsibility for elements of the policy. We have no further comment to make on this at this time.

Delivering Social Change: East Belfast

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, further to their announcement on the signature projects of Delivering Social Change, how the six signature programmes will affect the East Belfast constituency.
(AQW 15372/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The lead departments responsible for the signature projects will be developing Programme Delivery Plans in the coming weeks, with the aim of having work rolled out at the earliest possible opportunity. We anticipate that all zones will benefit in some way from the projects.

Peace III Funding: Maze Project

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) who was the lead partner in any application for PEACE III funding in respect of the Maze project; (ii) when any such application was approved by the SEUPB Steering Committee; and (iii) where the minutes of this Steering Committee meeting are available.
(AQW 17092/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Maze/Long Kesh Development Corporation is the lead partner for the PEACE III funding in respect of the Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre project at Maze/Long Kesh.

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) Steering Committee approved the application for the Peace III funding on 15 December 2011.

Minutes of PEACE III Theme 2.2 Steering Committee meetings are produced by, and available from SEUPB.

Welfare Reform: Childcare Strategy

Mr McClarty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the introduction of Welfare Reform will affect the Childcare Strategy.
(AQW 17300/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: In developing the Childcare Strategy, we are aiming to create an environment where childcare is accessible to all parents and to achieve a level of childcare provision that meets the needs of parents and children.

The potential impact of Welfare Reform is one of the significant factors we have taken into account in planning the Childcare Strategy. We recognise that Welfare Reform could result in a potential increase in demand for childcare places and that the Childcare Strategy will need to respond to this demand.

Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration

Mr Lyttle asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the forthcoming Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration complies with the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies which was published by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe High Commissioner on National Minorities on 7 November 2012. (AQW 17328/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Ljubljana Guidelines provide guidance on how States can work towards increasing integration and social cohesion while ensuring protection and promotion of human rights, including the rights of distinct communities to have their identities protected.

The forthcoming Strategy for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration is being developed primarily to address the continuing division and tensions within our society. This includes issues around cultural identity and the expression of cultural identity. At its very heart, therefore, are the principles that are outlined within the Ljubljana Guidelines.

The Strategy will tackle indigenous inter-community relations and address the increasingly diverse multi-cultural nature of our society alongside the new Racial Equality Strategy.

Victims and Survivors Service: Funding Applications

Mr Nesbitt asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) whether there will be an Independent Assessment Panel, or similar group, to assess applications to the Victims and Survivors Service for funding in 2013 to 2015; (ii) to list the names of people appointed to sit on the panel; (iii) the process by which they were appointed; and (iv) the criteria used to assess the suitability of the individuals appointed. (AQW 17442/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Victims and Survivors Service is establishing two panels to assess the applications to the Service for funding in 2013 to 2015, an Independent Grant Funding Panel and an Independent Grant Funding Appeals Panel.

The overall objective of the panels is to ensure a fair, objective and impartial mechanism for funding applications to be considered.

Positions for both of the panels listed above have been publicly advertised and the appointment process has not yet concluded.

Childcare Strategy

Mr Durkan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Childcare Strategy. (AQW 17451/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current Programme for Government includes a commitment to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy to provide integrated and affordable childcare. The Strategy will be aligned with the primary focus of the Programme for Government, which is to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

On 5 December 2012, we launched a public consultation on the Executive's proposed Childcare Strategy. The consultation document "Towards a Childcare Strategy" sets out the vision and principles for a future Childcare Strategy and provides an opportunity for those with an interest to help shape the development of the Strategy. The public consultation process runs until 5 March 2013 after which all comments received will be reviewed and a final Childcare Strategy developed. We have also recently taken decisions that would allow up to a further £4.5 million to be allocated from the central ring-fenced Childcare Fund to support actions on the ground as the Strategy continues to be developed.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to what extent proposals for capital or resource spending, under the Social Investment Fund, will be subject to the normal requirements for the submission of a business case. (AQW 17602/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The nine Social Investment Steering Groups will prioritise eligible proposals across their zones, supported by their appointed consultants. Strategic proposals for capital and resource spending will be subject to the normal business case requirements before inclusion in the draft area plan for each zone. Area plans will be subject to scrutiny and verification by officials.

Social Investment Fund

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail how proposals for capital or resource spending under the Social Investment Fund will be evaluated to ascertain their robustness as business propositions. (AQW 17605/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: All proposals submitted within the strategic area plans will be subject to economic appraisal in line with the Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation.

Assets Management Unit

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the £87.7m of receipts identified by the Assets Management Unit.

(AQW 17631/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Asset Management Unit (AMU) within the Strategic Investment Board (SIB) has identified assets for disposal as follows, broken down by department:

£ Millions	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total	Actual 2011/12
DARD	0.27			0.27	0.52
DCAL	0.56	0.06		0.62	0.16
DE	1.50	1.71	1.25	4.46	0.64
DFP	0.40	0.09	2.90	3.39	0.58
DEL	0.45			0.45	
DETI					
DHSSPS	3.69	1.26	0.28	5.23	0.24
DOJ					
DOE					
OFMDFM			0.20	0.20	
DRD	1.35	1.60	19.10	22.05	0.7
DSD	16.67	16.67	16.67	50.01	
Totals	24.89	21.39	40.40	86.68	2.84

These projections are based on valuations undertaken by Land and Property Services in early 2012 and will be subject to adjusted valuations and the prevailing property market conditions at the time of disposal. Individual disposals depend on departmental schedules, economic appraisals and commercial considerations in terms of timing and expected price.

Receipts from April 2012 to October 2012 total £18.9m, with a number of additional disposals expected to be completed by the end of the financial year.

Unanswered Question

Mr Kinahan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why they have yet to answer AQW 14987/11-15, which was due for answer on 17 October 2012; and when they will provide an answer to the question.

(AQW 17752/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We refer the Member to the answer to AQW 14987/11-15 issued on 17 December 2012.

Childcare Strategy: Departmental Research

Mr Agnew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister whether their Department was required to conduct its own research on the issue of a childcare strategy; and to outline the rationale for not basing the strategy on the comprehensive and pre-existing research already available, such as that from Employers For Childcare.

(AQW 17931/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: It is essential that the Childcare Strategy is supported by research that is up to date and addresses all of the issues relevant to this policy area. This is why our Department has initiated its own childcare research rather than rely solely on the work of organisations outside government. This research aims to establish current and future demand for childcare, current childcare provision, its cost, any gaps in provision and the groups and communities most affected by these gaps.

It will also take full account of other, recent childcare research, including that of Employers for Childcare.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Mussel Beds: Carlingford Lough

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department owns the mussel beds lying on the Newry side of the proposed bridge over Carlingford Lough.

(AQW 17347/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): My Department does not own mussel beds on the Newry side of the proposed bridge over Carlingford Lough.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how each of her Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17626/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My arm's-length bodies 30 Day Payment Performance is as follows:

Northern Ireland Fishery Harbour Authority	95%
Livestock and Meat Commission	97%
Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI)	78%
Loughs Agency	98%

Figures are for 2011/12 financial year except for Loughs Agency which is 2011 calendar year.

As set out in the percentages above, payment performance is good across the ALBs. AFBI has taken action in the current financial year to improve performance, resulting in 92% of payments achieving the 30 day prompt payment target up to 30 November 2012.

Farmers: Debt

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for her assessment of the amount of financial debt that farmers have with banks and other lending Institutions.

(AQW 17640/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Bank borrowing is an important source of finance for the farming sector. The level of borrowing by farmers fluctuates from year to year, as the figures below indicate.

The following figures are estimates obtained from British Bankers Association data for the north of Ireland and relate to average bank lending to agriculture (including for land purchase) from banks and building societies in the north of Ireland and Britain bank clearing system.

2008	£837 million
2009	£879 million
2010	£855 million
2011	£804 million
2012	£821 million*

* The average for 2012 is based on the first three quarters of the calendar year only while the figures for previous years are annual averages for the calendar year. Note that non-bank lending, trade credit, hire purchase and leasing are not included in the above figures.

Cockle Fishery Pilot

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how many tonnes of cockles were destroyed in Belfast Lough after the 2009 Cockle Fishing Experiment.

(AQW 17643/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: While my Department has no record of any physical destruction of cockles in Belfast Lough after the 2009 Pilot Cockle Fishery, scientific assessments of the Holywood Bank beds since the 2009 pilot fishery, have identified year on year reductions in mature cockles, as summarised in the table below:-

Cockle fisheries throughout Britain and the north have been affected by mass mortality and a lack of significant recruitment in recent years, due possibly to influences such as water quality, predation by wading bird species, site dynamics, infection and natural mortality.

I hope you find this helpful.

	October 2010 (tonnes)	March/Apr 2011 (tonnes)	August 2011 (tonnes)	May-July 2012 (tonnes)
Fished area (East of pipe)	12.980	7.538	6.794	6.537
Fished area to West of pipe	9.400	39.971	35.434	2.465
Unfished area to West of pipe	105.653	36.862	27.616	2.563
Area outside designated Fishing area but within Survey area	76.769	17.793	18.871	13.470
Total	204.802	102.164	87.715	25.035

Rural Childcare Programme

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail (i) the number of childcare places created through the Rural Childcare Programme; and (ii) the number of jobs created directly through the programme.
(AQW 17662/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: While DARD does not hold primary responsibility for Childcare service provision the Department developed and implemented the pilot Rural Childcare Programme as part of our wider rural poverty and social inclusion work between 2009 and 2011.

The projects supported through the programme created cumulative provision for: (i) 851 new childcare places; (ii) 157.5 permanent full time equivalent jobs and 16.5 temporary full time equivalent jobs.

Countryside Management Scheme

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why the Northern Ireland Countryside Management Scheme has now been restricted to priority habitats.
(AQW 17712/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The NI Countryside Management Scheme (NICMS) has not been restricted to priority habitats. It is a whole farm Scheme which means that participants must enter all owned eligible land, which is not leased out and is held by the farm business, into the Scheme. Whilst these areas may contain priority habitats, not all of the land will be classified as such. NICMS was oversubscribed in the 2008 and 2010 application periods. Therefore applications were prioritised based on a set of environmental criteria. This meant that applications with priority habitats were selected above applications which did not have these habitats. Prioritising applications in this way maximises environmental benefit to the countryside. The NICMS, however, continues to work towards its environmental aims relating to biodiversity, water quality, landscape and climate change across all land under agreement.

Environmental Protection

Mr Rogers asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether her Department has any plans to invest in environmental protection and enhanced schemes.
(AQW 17713/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department currently funds environmental protection and enhancement measures through the on-going delivery of agri-environment schemes.

There are 12,100 farmers participating in DARD agri-environment schemes, managing some 450,000 ha of land. This represents 44% of the agricultural area, and approximately £25m of funding is paid to farmers in these schemes each year.

An agri-environment scheme for the next Rural Development Programme period 2014-2020 is being developed. The next scheme will continue to provide funding for environmental protection and enhancement.

The reform of Europe's Common Agricultural Policy is ongoing, and the outcome of this process will help to shape the parameters of the next agri-environment scheme. However, it is envisaged that the scheme will include measures which aim to sustain and enhance biodiversity, improve water quality, increase woodland creation, and help to mitigate against climate change.

Forest Service: Relocation of Posts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for an update on the proposal to relocate Forest Service posts.
(AQW 17757/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: I announced at Balmoral Show on 17th May 2012 that I had asked the Chief Executive of the Forest Service to identify suitable premises in Fermanagh for the relocation of the headquarters of his Agency to that County.

Forest Service is working through the business case requirements for the relocation of Headquarters to Co Fermanagh which will inform the requirements of the new premises.

Forest Service has identified 57 posts currently located in Headquarters that will need to be considered for relocation. Forest Service will work closely with DARD DHR to find alternative posts for existing staff who are not re-headquartered to Co Fermanagh. Forest Service will consult with TUS throughout the process.

Tyrone Gaelic Athletic Association: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the funding Tyrone Gaelic Athletic Association has received from her Department, or its arms length bodies, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 17815/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As the member will be aware the Quality of Life Axis (Axis 3) of the EU Rural Development Programme is delivered through the EU LEADER approach by seven Joint Council Committees (JCCs) working in partnership with a Local Action Group (LAG) in Council Cluster areas.

Assisting Rural Communities (ARC) North West (NW) is responsible for delivery across the council areas of Omagh, Strabane, Derry and Limavady, and has awarded two Letters of Offer to Tyrone County GAA Committee following two separate open, competitive calls for applications:

- Letter of Offer of 22 May 2012 for £250,000 grant assistance toward an environmental and heritage project.
- Letter of Offer of 27 November 2012 for £594,656 grant assistance toward a floodlit 3G multi-activity facility.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to provide an update on the inventory of woodland which her Department is committed to publishing: and (ii) whether this inventory will include types and species and all research which is being gathered at present regarding Ash Dieback disease.

(AQW 17998/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) A preliminary woodland register providing a summary of woodland area and type by county, with a further breakdown by townland, has been published on the Forest Service website. The register is currently being refined to take account of areas of woodland captured by the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) project, and, using satellite imagery and analytical techniques, to exclude areas of non-woodland. Forest Service will update the published register at the end of this business year.
- (ii) The preliminary woodland register records woodland type into the categories broadleaf, conifer, mixed conifer/broadleaf, open ground, short rotation coppice or awaiting replanting or natural regeneration. A breakdown by tree species is not included.

In response to ash dieback disease, Forest Service has developed a separate electronic data capture and monitoring system based on GIS technology. This new spatial dataset may be used in conjunction with our existing GIS dataset, on which the woodland register is based, to map the current and future extent of the disease.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) whether she will consider options for enlisting the help and support of the general public to report on the health of trees to help eradicate Ash Dieback; (ii) whether she is aware of the bid for £2.5 million by the Forestry Commission, the Food and Environment Research Agency, the National Trust and The Woodland Trust for funding from the EU Life Fund, for a five year project to enable tree health scientists to extend their research and knowledge of the health of the UK's trees; (iii) whether she is aware of plans by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to support this bid; and (iv) whether she has plans for a similar approach.

(AQW 18000/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

- (i) At the Chalara Stakeholder meeting in Parliament Buildings on Tuesday 11 December, I indicated that partnerships were key in responding to the disease. At this time of year, when the trees are not in leaf, I am focusing on engaging professionals in the forestry, horticulture and landscape industries, together with professionals in central and local government, by providing training on disease recognition and circulating the relevant information. As the causal link between symptoms and the disease are difficult, even for professional, to confirm at this time of year, I plan to delay greater involvement with the general public until next summer. By that time, we will have completed our immediate surveys linked to trade, and have started on wider surveillance around sites of known infection. In the mean time the Department has a help line for the general public where we take calls about trees of concern, our website has links to photographs of disease symptoms and we have posters in our forest parks about basic bio-security.
- (ii), (iii) & (iv) I am aware of the bid made for EU Life Funding and, if successful, we would expect that the research would improve our knowledge about Chalara ash die-back as well as other causes of ill-health in trees.

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Apprenticeships: Departmental Contracts

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how many apprentices have been employed through departmental contracts in this financial year; and what percentage this number represents of the total posts allocated.

(AQW 15258/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Under the Programme-Led Apprenticeship (PLA) programme, introduced by the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) in September 2009, NICS Departments contribute by providing work placements for participants. While DCAL does not currently provide placements my Department remains committed to providing work placements for participants on this PLA programme.

With regard to the Stadium Programme, which my Department is funding and supporting, contractors will be required to identify the creation of sustainable ring-fenced apprentice opportunities for a designated number of new apprenticeships recruited from those sectors of society assessed as suffering greatest socio-economic inequalities, within those areas assessed as suffering greatest objective need and deprivation.

In addition, 5% of the contractor's workforce (if the contractor has 20 or more employees) must be employed on formally recognised paid apprenticeships.

And, 5% of the workforce of each first tier subcontractor (with 20 or more employees) must be employed on recognised paid apprenticeships.

Additional apprenticeship requirement will be identified on both the redevelopment of the IFA New National Stadium and the UCGAA Casement Park, which will commensurate with the scale of investment.

Derry City Football Club: Funding

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department and its arm's-length bodies have awarded to Derry City Football Club in each of the last five years.

(AQW 15512/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Neither my Department nor its arms-length bodies have awarded any funding to Derry City Football Club over the last five financial years.

Administration Costs

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why has there been a 4.9 percent increase in her Department's administration costs in six months in 2012/13, as outlined in Table H of the Minister of Finance and Personnel's statement to the Assembly on 12 November 2012.

(AQW 16773/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: There has not been a 4.9% increase in my Department's administration costs in the first six months of 2012/13.

Table H refers to a change in the Department's budget for administration costs for the full financial year 2012/13. This budget has increased to support a number of new priorities.

The Department's overall budget has not increased to accommodate this support; reduced requirements have been identified in other areas that have allowed transfer of the necessary budget without impacting on front line service provision.

Ulster Orchestra

Mr Ó hOisín asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department has provided the Ulster Orchestra in each of the last five years; and what this represents as a percentage of the overall funding accessed in each year by the Orchestra.

(AQW 17091/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: My Department through the Arts Council provided the following funding to the Ulster Orchestra over the last five years:

Year	Amount	Percentage of overall funding
2011/12	£2,205,315	52%
2010/11	£2,211,720	53%
2009/10	£2,050,113	51%
2008/09	£2,050,113	52%
2007/08	£1,967,238	49%

Illegal Netting

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much illegal netting has been seized in Lough Neagh in each month since January 2012; and how many people have been caught using illegal netting by wardens.

(AQW 17136/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table below details the number of illegal nets seized and their combined length.

DCAL Fisheries Protection Officers have detected 21 persons using illegal nets on Lough Neagh during this period.

Summary of Illegal Nets Seized at Lough Neagh January - October 2012

Month	Number of panel nets	Length of Panel nets seized	Number of Fyke Nets
January	1	1000M	0
February	13	11395M	0
March	8	3500m	0
April	0	0m	0
May	4	3600m	10
June	2	800m	0
July	3	550m	1
August	3	6600m	0
September	0	0m	0
October	29	7500m	2
Total	63	34945m	13

Soccer: Cross-community Engagement

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) what grants are available to encourage cross community engagement in soccer clubs; and (ii) the eligibility criteria for each grant.

(AQW 17187/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: At present, Sport NI has no funding programmes open for application.

Soccer: Cross-community Engagement

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, for each of the last three years, to detail (i) the number of grants awarded for cross-community engagement in soccer clubs; and (ii) to whom the grants were allocated, broken down by constituency.

(AQW 17188/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI does not provide funding specifically aimed at cross-community engagement in soccer clubs. However, in 2010 Sport NI amended the terms and conditions of its funding to include a clause in relation to equality and good relations. As a result, applicants must operate an equal opportunity policy during and after completion of the project. They must also take all reasonable steps to ensure that the facilities and premises assisted shall be run in an inclusive manner which will aspire to, and promote, good relations.

In the last 3 financial years Sport NI has made 82 awards to soccer clubs with 26 grants awarded in 2009/10; 39 grants in 2010/11 and 17 grants in 2011/12. Details of where grants were allocated, by constituency, are detailed in the table attached at Annex A.

ANNEX A

Constituency	Award Date	Organisation Name	Total
Belfast East	2009/10	H & W Welders FC	£75,488
	2009/10	Knockbreda FC	£87,100
	2010/11	Cregagh Wanderers Youth FC	£3,127
	2011/12	Belfast United Women's Football Club	£6,385
	2011/12	Cregagh Wanderers Youth FC	£1,673
	2010/11	Glentoran FC	£30,000

Constituency	Award Date	Organisation Name	Total
Belfast East	2010/11	Glentoran FC	£15,000
	2011/12	Glentoran FC	£14,350
Belfast East Total			£233,123
Belfast North	2009/10	Crusaders FC	£209,075
	2009/10	Crusaders FC	£231,631
	2009/10	Crusaders Youth FC	£9,021
	2010/11	Brantwood FC	£1,776
	2010/11	Crusaders FC	£8,000
	2010/11	St Patricks FC	£2,650
	2010/11	St Patrick's Young Men/Girls FC	£4,250
	2010/11	Shamrock FC	£2,273
	2010/11	Crusaders FC	£27,506
	2010/11	Crusaders FC	£29,984
	2010/11	Crusaders FC	£215,280
	2011/12	Crusaders FC	£431,300
	2011/12	Crusaders Youth FC	£1,386
	2011/12	Newington FC	£2,312
	2011/12	St Patricks FC	£1,053
Belfast North Total			£1,177,497
Belfast South	2010/11	Linfield FC	£9,675
	2010/11	Linfield FC	£43,906
	2011/12	Aquinas FC	£1,795
Belfast South Total			£55,376
Belfast West	2009/10	Sport and Leisure FC	£87,050
	2010/11	Donegal Celtic FC	£20,204
	2010/11	Donegal Celtic FC	£28,750
	2011/12	Glendowan Boys FC	£5,014
	2011/12	Sport and Leisure FC	£1,791
Belfast West Total			£142,809
East Antrim	2009/10	Greenisland FC	£3,076
	2009/10	Greenisland FC	£985
	2010/11	Carrick Rangers FC	£22,849
	2010/11	Larne FC	£23,325
	2010/11	Carrick Rangers FC	£29,911
	2010/11	Larne FC	£29,875
	2011/12	Carrick Rangers FC	£245,000
East Antrim Total			£355,021
East Londonderry	2009/10	Portstewart FC	£79,713
	2010/11	Coleraine FC	£29,850
	2010/11	Coleraine FC	£37,217

Constituency	Award Date	Organisation Name	Total
East Londonderry Total			£146,780
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	2009/10	Dungannon Swifts FC	£232,000
	2009/10	Ballinamallard United FC	£87,050
	2009/10	Ballinamallard United FC	£132,978
	2010/11	Lisnaskea Rovers FC	£4,987
	2011/12	Dungannon United Youth FC	£4,024
Fermanagh & South Tyrone Total			£461,039
Foyle	2010/11	Institute FC	£686,135
	2010/11	Institute FC	£121,865
Foyle Total			£808,000
Mid Ulster	2009/10	Moyola Park AFC	£83,079
	2010/11	Draperstown Celtic FC	£1,848
Mid Ulster Total			£84,927
Newry & Armagh	2009/10	Tullyvallen Rangers FC	£192,494
	2009/10	Newry City FC	£231,500
	2009/10	Laurelvale FC	£1,073
	2009/10	Newry City FC	£8,500
	2010/11	Armagh City FC	£84,080
	2010/11	Newry City FC	£28,737
	2010/11	Newry City FC	£29,950
	2011/12	Newry City FC	£2,335
Newry & Armagh Total			£578,669
North Antrim	2009/10	Ballymena United FC	£250,015
	2009/10	Ballymena United FC	£217,035
	2010/11	Ballymena United FC	£557,985
	2010/11	Ballymoney United FC	£5,033
North Antrim Total			£1,030,068
North Down	2010/11	1st Bangor Ladies FC	£1,813
North Down Total			£1,813
South Antrim	2009/10	Ballyclare Comrades FC	£232,000
	2010/11	Ballyclare Comrades FC	£29,682
	2010/11	Ballyclare Comrades FC	£29,970
	2011/12	Crumlin United FC	£232,600
South Antrim Total			£524,252
South Down	2009/10	Warrenpoint Town FC	£245,000
	2010/11	Tollymore United FC	£2,707
	2011/12	Castlewellan FC	£1,126
	2011/12	Moneyslane Football Club	£245,000
South Down Total			£493,833
Strangford	2009/10	Dungoyne Boys FC	£7,375
Strangford Total			£7,375

Constituency	Award Date	Organisation Name	Total
Upper Bann	2009/10	Glenavon FC	£347,000
	2009/10	Lurgan Celtic FC	£77,905
	2009/10	Annagh United FC	£84,872
	2009/10	Portadown FC	£314,495
	2010/11	Glenavon FC	£19,062
	2010/11	Portadown FC	£18,801
	2010/11	Portadown FC	£29,979
	2010/11	Glenavon FC	£5,342
	2010/11	Dollingstown FC	£30,000
	2011/12	Annagh United FC	£6,982
Upper Bann Total			£934,438
Grand Total			£7,035,020

Sport in the Community

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 16281/11-15, whether there is any direct duplication of provision between the Department for Social Development's Sport in the Community Project and the projects delivered by Sport NI.

(AQW 17273/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Responsibility for checking that there is no duplication of existing provision rests with the owner of Project, in this case, the Department for Social Development (DSD). DSD has advised that "in managing all projects, the Voluntary and Community Unit applies the principles of the Urban Regeneration and Community Development (URCDG) Common Procedures which require checks on other funding to Groups making applications to URCDG funding to ensure that there is no duplication".

In addition, DSD has stated to DCAL that the primary purpose of its Sport in the Community Project is to support its Volunteering Strategy, which aims to develop new volunteering opportunities, increase volunteer involvement and promote good practice in volunteer management. These objectives complement, but do not duplicate, the objectives of projects delivered by Sport NI.

Líofa: Cost of Event at Custom House Square, Belfast

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in relation to her response to AQW 13899-/11-15 where she stipulates 'This funding will be met from within the Department's Líofa budget' and her response to AQW 15953/11-15 where she stipulates 'There is no specific Líofa budget', which of these is correct.

(AQW 17274/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: AQW 15953/11-15 is correct - my Department has not allocated specific funding to Líofa for each financial year. Individual Business Cases are prepared for expenditure associated with Líofa such as Líofa's first Anniversary Birthday Event.

The answer provided to you in relation to AQW 13899/11-15 "The Líofa Birthday event at Custom House Square cost £17,972. This funding will be met from within the Department's Líofa budget" should for clarity purposes have emphasised that the costs were being met from the Líofa Birthday budget. There is no general Líofa budget.

As part of the June Monitoring Round, a number of reduced requirements were identified across the Department and its Arms Length Bodies. These available funds were allocated to allow priorities one of which was the Líofa birthday event.

Electricity Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail her Department's electricity costs in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 17292/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department incurred the following electricity charges in the last three financial years:

2011-12	2010-11	2009-10
£234,973	£183,293	£119,388

Boddagh and Black Boddagh: Lough Neagh Basin

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 16550/11-15, whether the status report of stock levels in the Lough Neagh Basin and its tributaries will be recorded by species rather than by the generic term trout.

(AQW 17349/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Northern Ireland Trout Stock Status report under compilation by Agri-Foods and Biosciences Institute will be based on the distribution and numbers of juvenile brown trout recorded alongside salmon in electro-fishing of rivers under the Salmon Management Strategy (SMS). The Lough Neagh/Bann system tributaries covered by this analysis of SMS data will include the Rivers Main, Blackwater and Clady.

As the surveys are of juveniles in spawning and nursery areas, the report will not differentiate between migratory or resident groups. The progeny of river resident trout, lake growing trout with river spawning and sea growing trout with river spawning are all recorded and are not differentiated in the SMS data.

Sport: Centre of Participation, Dunsilly

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what funding her Department has allocated to develop Antrim's Centre of Participation at Dunsilly.

(AQW 17408/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: In October 2009, Sport NI provided £225,000 under its Places for Sport programme towards the construction of a full size sand carpet Gaelic pitch at Dunsilly. This pitch development was part of the first phase of the Centre of Excellence project. Sport NI has received no further applications for funding in relation to the Centre.

Odyssey Trust Company: Remuneration Obligation

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, given that the Funding Agreement of 21 December 1998 relating to the Odyssey Trust Company (OTC) requires that none of the OTC directors, employees or service providers are paid salaries, fees or emoluments which exceed reasonable and proper open market and arm's-length commercial rates, how her Department ensures that this obligation is being met in circumstances where the Department has not had access to the independent report commissioned by OTC.

(AQW 17476/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The independent remuneration report referred to in my response to AQW4288/11-15 was commissioned by the Trustees of the Odyssey Trust Company. While my Department does not hold a copy of this report it had full access to its findings and recommendations which were presented by the Remuneration Committee to the Board of Trustees. A senior departmental official attended this meeting.

Sport: Active Communities Programme

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail (i) the financial support given by her Department to the Active Communities Sports coaching in the last 2 years, and (ii) the projected spend for the rest of this Assembly mandate.

(AQW 17536/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI's Active Communities programme is a sports Lottery programme. My Department does not, therefore, provide exchequer funding to the programme.

In the last two financial years, however, Sport NI has provided £4,886,205 Lottery funding to Active Communities. Furthermore, an indicative Lottery budget of £7,515,736 is profiled for Active Communities for the period 1 April 2012 until 30 September 2014.

Bliain Na Gaeilge/The Year of Irish Language

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what steps she is taking to encourage Irish language communities and groups to participate in Bliain Na Gaeilge/The Year of Irish Language.

(AQW 17601/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Department's Líofoa Development Officer is working with Bliain na Gaeilge to ensure that where possible the Líofoa initiative promotes Bliain na Gaeilge/ The Year of Irish Language. For example, Líofoa and Bliain na Gaeilge are cooperating to develop a New Year's Resolution campaign in relation to learning Irish, Líofoa sign-up links are embedded in the Bliain na Gaeilge website and Líofoa is planning an Irish Language event in September 2013 and this will complement Bliain na Gaeilge.

My Department and Foras na Gaeilge are represented on the working group of Bliain na Gaeilge.

Foras na Gaeilge have approved a grant of €25,000 for promotional materials for Bliain na Gaeilge. Foras na Gaeilge will also actively promote activities related to Bliain na Gaeilge 2013 throughout the year and groups interested in organising celebratory events will be able to apply for funding under their small grants schemes in 2013.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how each of her Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17620/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Performance against the 30 day prompt payment target by the Department's ALBs for the current year to date is as follows:

ALB	Success rate (%)
Arts Council	100
Ni Screen	98
Armagh Observatory and planetarium	100
National Museums	100
Museums Council	98
Libraries NI	98
Sport NI	99
World Police and Fire Games	100
The Language Body	95
Waterways Ireland	77

Records are not maintained on performance against the target across business sectors.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect her Department.

(AQW 17622/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Directive to which you refer (2011/7/EU) is based on already existing legislation in this country and will essentially extend the protections already enjoyed by local businesses across the European Union. The only difference is that the Directive provides for minimum compensation of approximately £31; current law provides for a three tiered payment depending on contract value.

The Directive will therefore have minimal impact on this Department and any other public authority.

Arts Council: Purchase of Band Instruments

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure when the Arts Council will commence a programme for the purchase of band instruments.

(AQW 17787/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The Arts Council is likely to commence a programme for the purchase of band instruments in April 2013. The exact dates and times have yet to be agreed.

Department of Education

Suspensions: Principals and Teachers

Dr McDonnell asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of (i) principals; and (ii) teachers who have received (a) precautionary; and (b) medical suspensions from schools over the last five years, broken down by (1) sector; (2) gender; (3) primary or post-primary; and (4) the total number of weeks of each suspension.

(AQW 17453/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The table below provides details of the total number of suspensions from schools over the last five complete financial years, broken down by (1) sector, (2) gender, (3) primary or post-primary and (4) the total number of weeks of each suspension.

Details are not broken down by type of suspension as the Department does not hold this information. Suspension details for teachers and principals have been merged in order to prevent possible identification of individuals.

Principals/ Teachers	Education Sectors				Gender		School Type			Total Number of weeks suspended
	Controlled	Maintained	Grant- Maintained Integrated	Other-Main- tained	M	F	Primary	Post-Primary	Special	
1	√					√		√		0.3
2	√					√	√			0.4
3		√				√	√			0.6
4		√				√	√			0.7
5		√				√	√			0.9
6	√					√		√		1
7		√				√	√			1
8		√				√	√			1
9		√			√		√			1
10	√					√		√		2
11		√			√			√		2
12		√				√	√			2
13		√				√	√			2
14		√				√	√			2
15		√				√		√		2
16	√					√	√			3
17	√					√			√	3
18	√				√				√	3
19		√			√			√		3
20		√				√	√			3
21		√				√	√			3
22		√			√		√			3
23		√				√		√		3
24		√				√	√			3
25										3
26		√				√	√			3
27	√					√			√	4
28		√			√			√		4
29		√			√			√		4
30		√				√	√			4
31		√			√		√			4
32		√				√		√		4
33		√				√	√			4
34		√				√		√		4
35		√				√		√		4
36		√				√	√			4
37	√				√		√			5

Principals/ Teachers	Education Sectors				Gender		School Type			Total Number of weeks suspended
	Controlled	Maintained	Grant- Maintained Integrated	Other-Main- tained	M	F	Primary	Post-Primary	Special	
38	√					√		√		5
39		√				√	√			5
40		√				√		√		5
41		√				√	√			5
42		√				√		√		5
43	√				√			√		6
44		√			√		√			6
45		√				√	√			6
46		√			√		√			6
47		√				√	√			7
48		√			√		√			7
49		√				√	√			7
50		√				√	√			7
51		√				√	√			7
52	√				√			√		8
53	√				√			√		8
54										8
55		√				√		√		8
56	√				√			√		9
57	√				√				√	9
58		√				√	√			9
59		√				√	√			9
60	√				√				√	10
61	√					√			√	10
62		√				√	√			10
63		√				√		√		10
64	√					√		√		11
65		√			√		√			11
66		√				√	√			11
67		√				√	√			11
68	√					√	√			12
69		√			√			√		12
70		√				√	√			13
71		√				√	√			13
72		√				√	√			13
73		√			√			√		14
74		√				√		√		15

Principals/ Teachers	Education Sectors				Gender		School Type			Total Number of weeks suspended
	Controlled	Maintained	Grant- Maintained Integrated	Other-Main- tained	M	F	Primary	Post-Primary	Special	
75	√					√	√			18
76		√				√	√			19
77	√				√			√		20
78		√				√	√			20
79	√					√	√			22
80		√			√		√			23
81		√				√		√		25
82		√				√	√			25
83	√				√				√	26
84		√			√			√		31
85										36
86										38
87										38
88	√					√			√	39
89	√				√				√	42
90		√			√			√		42
91		√				√	√			43
92		√			√		√			48
93	√					√	√			49
94	√					√	√			50
95		√			√		√			50
96										51
97		√				√	√			53
98	√				√			√		54
99		√			√		√			60
100		√				√	√			61
101	√					√			√	64
102	√					√			√	66
103		√				√	√			66
104	√				√		√			68
105	√					√	√			76
106	√				√			√		78
107		√				√	√			90
108	√				√				√	101
109	√					√		√		105
110		√			√		√			115
111		√				√	√			115

Principals/ Teachers	Education Sectors				Gender		School Type			Total Number of weeks suspended
	Controlled	Maintained	Grant- Maintained Integrated	Other-Main- tained	M	F	Primary	Post-Primary	Special	
112	√				√			√		117
113	√				√				√	121
114	√				√			√		126
115		√			√			√		147
Total*	38	71			39	70	61	35	13	N/A

* Totals shown sum to 109 because six teachers were suspended in the Grant Maintained Integrated & Other Maintained sectors. Details have not been included due to a risk of possible identification.

Controlled figures include controlled Integrated Overall figures do not include Voluntary Grammar Schools.

Raymond McCreesh Park, Newry

Mr Irwin asked the Minister of Education, in relation to the minutes of the Newry and Mourne District Council Technical/ Environmental Services Committee meeting on 26 October 2009, what involvement the Southern Education and Library Board had in the development of the Raymond McCreesh Park in Newry.
(AQW 17663/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Southern Education & Library Board has no role in the development or management of the play park other than its involvement in the creation of an art installation designed by local primary school children and attached to a side wall on the site.

Welfare Reform: Projected Cost

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has any plans to undertake an assessment of the projected costs to education as a result of the implementation of the welfare reforms; and to outline these assessments.
(AQW 17691/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Universal Credit (UC) will be introduced as part of the Welfare Reform Agenda and will replace a number of existing social welfare benefits including five of the benefits currently used to determine eligibility for free school meals and school uniform grants. These five benefits are the qualifying criteria for the majority of all claims for free school meals so an amendment to the Department's eligibility criteria will be required to facilitate the introduction of UC.

The projected costs will depend on the approach to be adopted which has not yet been decided.

Work is currently underway to assess the potential impact of the introduction of UC on areas of Departmental expenditure. I will be giving careful consideration to the findings of this analysis once it has been completed.

Science: 'The World Around Us'

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education (i) for his assessment of the impact on the uptake and teaching of science following the incorporation of the teaching of science into 'The World Around Us' in 2006; (ii) for his assessment of the level of science taught in primary schools; and (iii) whether he has any plans to refocus the curriculum on the teaching of science.
(AQW 17692/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd:

- (i) assessment of the impact on the uptake and teaching of science following the incorporation of the teaching of science into 'The World Around Us' in 2006;

The revised curriculum, which is now in place in all grant aided schools, was introduced on a phased basis between September 2007 and June 2010 and is in the process of being embedded in schools here. It is therefore too soon to say what impact the incorporation of the teaching of science into 'The World Around Us' has had on the uptake and teaching of science.

My Department currently measures the uptake of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects using examination entries. An analysis based on examination entries at the end of Key Stage 4 indicates that the proportion of GCSE entries in STEM subjects increased by 2.4 percentage points over the period 2005/06 to 2010/11. Over the same time period, the proportion of entries in STEM A Level subjects increased by 3.4 percentage points. Across individual A-Level STEM subjects there has been an upward trend since 2004/05.

- (ii) for his assessment of the level of science taught in primary schools;

During the period of 2009-2012, the Education and Training Inspectorate Primary inspection findings indicate that in 77% of the World Around Us lessons observed, the quality of the teaching was good or better. This data includes the contributory subjects of science and technology, geography and history.

The results from the recently published Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) ranked our primary school performance in science 21st out of 50 countries surveyed, with a scale score significantly above the international average. The PISA 2009 results of our 15 years olds also placed our pupils above the OECD international average in science.

- (iii) If there are any plans to refocus the curriculum on the teaching of science.

The revised Primary Curriculum contains a number of statutory 'Areas of Learning' and emphasises the development of the 'Cross-Curricular Skills' and the 'Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities'. Science and Technology (along with History and Geography) is one of the three contributory elements of the area of learning The World Around Us and I have no plans at this moment to seek a comprehensive review of the primary curriculum.

Council for Catholic Maintained Schools: Certificate in Religious Education

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education when the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools ended its mandatory requirement of a Certificate in Religious Education for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position in a Catholic Maintained post-primary school; and to give the reason for this position.

(AQW 17750/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) requirement to possess a Certificate in Religious Education for all those seeking appointment to a permanent teaching position here applies to Catholic Maintained Primary and Nursery schools only. This is to recognise that Nursery and Primary schools have a pivotal role in preparing children to receive each of the Sacraments.

There has never been a requirement to possess the Certificate to work in Post Primary schools however some schools may seek the Certificate as a job related criterion.

Nursery Provision: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education what long term actions are proposed to address nursery provision in North Down.

(AQW 17794/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Programme for Government commits my Department to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Of the 23,134 applications received from parents of target age children for 2012/13 pre-school places, 22,537 resulted in the offer of a funded place. Of the remaining applications:

- 24 were from parents who engaged fully with the process, but whose children remained unplaced at its conclusion;
- 31 were from parents who submitted late applications;
- 542 were from parents who chose not to engage fully with the admissions process by expressing further preferences when invited to do so.

I have increased the budget (4.13% higher than in 2012/13) available for the pre-school programme and my Department has liaised with Education and Library Boards (ELBs) so they can secure the estimated number of funded places required for the 2013/14 school year.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) PEAG is currently considering a further three voluntary/private settings located in Bangor for inclusion in the pre-school programme for 2013/14.

In addition, I am considering a development proposal which has been published by the SEELB for a 26 part-time place nursery unit at Ballymagee Primary School.

My officials will continue to work closely with the SEELB to respond to the demand for funded places in the North Down area.

Preschool Applications

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pre-school applications were received from residents of (i) BT 19; (ii) BT 20; (iii) BT 21; (iv) BT 22; and (v) BT 23 in each of the last three academic years.

(AQW 17824/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: At the end of the Pre-School Admissions process for places in September 2012 the number of pre-school applications received from children in their final pre-school year, broken down by the relevant postcodes, is as follows:

(i)	BT19	445
(ii)	BT20	260

(iii)	BT21	82
(iv)	BT22	212
(v)	BT23	580

Applications for admission to places in 2010 and 2011 were not recorded by postcode and information for these years is therefore not available in the format requested.

Part-time Schooling

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of young people who are currently educated in a mixture of part-time schooling and part-time home education; and for his assessment of this form of education.

(AQW 17848/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Education and Library Boards have confirmed that they are not aware of any young people being educated in a mixture of part-time schooling and part-time home education. The Department does not hold information on the number of young people who are schooled in this manner in the voluntary grammar or grant maintained integrated sector.

The Department has not undertaken an assessment of flexi-schooling and has no plans to do so.

Bangor Grammar School: Road Safety at New Site

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education whether his Department looked into the issue of road safety for pupils at the new Bangor Grammar School site.

(AQW 17891/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Board of Governors of Bangor Grammar School are the contracting authority for the new school and it is the responsibility of the school's Board of Governors to ensure the road safety for pupils at the new Bangor Grammar School site. The school's Project Manager for the new school build has, therefore, confirmed that as a result of extensive consultation with Planning Service and Roads Service the following traffic/pedestrian safety elements have been incorporated:

- Right turning lane into the school from the Gransha Road;
- Puffin pedestrian crossing off the Gransha Road;
- Traffic set down and pick up bays on the Gransha Road;
- Improved footpath works and street lighting to the school frontage;
- Bus parking and traffic set down /pick up areas within the school grounds;
- Extensive parking facilities for staff ,visitors and pupils;
- Segregated pedestrian and cycle routes within the school grounds;
- Dedicated bicycle parking within the school grounds;
- Overflow parking has been facilitated on the school playground for specific busy school events.

The works on the public road have now been completed and accepted by Road Service for adoption.

Nursery School Places: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education what plans he has to address nursery school provision in North Down.

(AQW 17893/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Programme for Government commits my Department to ensuring that at least one year of pre-school education is available to every family that wants it.

Of the 23,134 applications received from parents of target age children for 2012/13 pre-school places, 22,537 resulted in the offer of a funded place. Of the remaining applications:

- 24 were from parents who engaged fully with the process, but whose children remained unplaced at its conclusion;
- 31 were from parents who submitted late applications;
- 542 were from parents who chose not to engage fully with the admissions process by expressing further preferences when invited to do so.

I have increased the budget (4.13% higher than in 2012/13) available for the pre-school programme and my Department has liaised with Education and Library Boards (ELBs) so they can secure the estimated number of funded places required for the 2013/14 school year.

The South Eastern Education and Library Board (SEELB) PEAG is currently considering a further three voluntary/private settings located in Bangor for inclusion in the pre-school programme for 2013/14.

In addition, I am considering a development proposal which has been published by the SEELB for a 26 part-time place nursery unit at Ballymagee Primary School.

My officials will continue to work closely with the SEELB to respond to the demand for funded places in the North Down area.

Education and Skills Authority: Irish Medium Specialists

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education, further to his statement that the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) will need to ensure that it has staff with knowledge and expertise in Irish-medium education, to detail the number of such staff required at each grade or level within the ESA and any employment criteria that will be applied to such posts.

(AQW 17906/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: An Irish Medium Education Project Manager has been seconded to the ESA Implementation Team (ESAIT) to advise ESAIT and my Department on the implementation of the recommendations contained within the Irish Medium Review. This Project Manager shall also advise on what may be required within ESA to promote and develop Irish-medium education. This work is ongoing.

Education and Library Boards: Running Costs

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the cost of running each Education and Library Board in the last financial year; and the estimated cost of the Education and Skills Authority in its first year.

(AQW 17907/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The cost of running each of Education and Library Board (ELB) in the last financial year is provided in their published annual accounts. The annual accounts for SEELB and SELB have not yet been laid. The running costs of the other three ELBs are detailed below:

ELB	Running Costs £'000
BELB	253,693
NEELB	315,912
WELB	313,334

Notes: This information is contained in Note 32 of the ELB Annual Accounts and relates to DE funded costs only in respect of Schools and Youth.

The budgets for 2013-14 have not yet been finalised. A high level estimate of the annual budget for the Education and Skills Authority in 2013-14 is c£1.8bn.

GCSEs: Abolition and Replacement

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the decision by the Secretary of State for Education to abolish and replace GCSEs.

(AQW 17934/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: Decisions on any changes to GCSEs here are a devolved matter and I will ensure that all short term and long term impacts are considered as well as issues of equality. That is why I recently announced a fundamental review of GCSE and GCE A Level qualifications here. I have seen no evidence to date that there is any cause for concern but am open to considering new ideas. Until I receive the final report arising from this review I will make no decisions on the future of qualifications here.

My Department will remain in regular contact with the Department for Education and will consider any impact on pupils here of potential changes to GCSEs offered in England, should they be adopted.

I also note the outcome of the recent review of qualifications in Wales whereby GCSEs and GCEs will be retained and strengthened.

Mathematics: Central Body

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Education, in light of recent studies that show Northern Ireland schools performing well in mathematics, whether his Department will now consider establishing a centralised body of parent representatives to ensure a coordinated approach and sharing of best practice.

(AQW 17962/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: With regard to the results from the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), which were published on 11 December 2012, I have no plans to establish a centralised body of parent representative to ensure a coordinated approach and sharing of best practice.

TIMSS is an international comparison study of mathematics and science achievement at ages 9-10 (primary 6 children). The results show that primary school pupils are performing well above the international average in numeracy, where they are ranked 6th out of 50 countries surveyed. In science, our pupils are ranked 21st and also scored significantly above the international average.

Schools in the north of Ireland also took part in a parallel international comparison study of reading achievement at ages 9-10, called Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) and were ranked 5th out of 45 participating countries.

It is clear that the characteristics of a good school, set out in 'Every School a Good School - a Policy for School Improvement', are being embedded in our school system: good teaching and good leadership with strong community engagement and a clear focus on the needs of the pupil. My policies aimed at raising educational standards, including the sharing of best practice, are having a direct and positive impact on pupil attainment.

The education authorities continue to work with schools to ensure the dissemination of best practice. In addition, ESaGS.tv provides a resource through which outstanding or very good practice highlighted in school inspection reports is made available to schools and teachers on demand and at the point of need.

Autism: Statement of Special Educational Needs, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school children living in the Strabane district have a statement of special educational needs for autism.

(AQW 17977/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The information requested is detailed in the table below.

Pupils resident in the Strabane district council area who are recorded as having Autism and also have a statement of special educational needs¹ – 2011/12

School type	Total pupils
Voluntary and Private preschools ²	0
Nursery schools ²	0
Nursery units and reception	0
Primary schools Year 1 - 7	23
Post-primary schools	11
Special schools	26
Total	60

Source: school census

Notes:

- 1 Figures include pupils at stage 5 of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice only.
- 2 Figures relate to nursery school and voluntary and private preschool centre location, as individual pupil address information is not held by the Department.

Autism: Statement of Special Educational Needs, Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education how many (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; and (iii) post-primary school children in Strabane, who have been diagnosed with autism, are awaiting a statement of special educational needs; and how many children with autism have been refused a statement in the last twelve months.

(AQW 17978/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Western Education and Library Board of the following.

Awaiting Statement for Mainstream Schools	Numbers
Pre- School	0
Primary School	0
Post Primary School	0

Board declined to issue statement	Numbers
Pre- School	0
Primary School	5
Post Primary School	0

Autism: Western Education and Library Board

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what support services the Western Education and Library Board provides for (i) pre-school; (ii) primary school; (iii) secondary school pupils with autism.

(AQW 17981/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) that the Board's Autistic Spectrum Advisory Service can provide pupils with a diagnosis of autism the following support at Pre-School and in Primary and Post Primary schools:

1. **Advice and information:** Telephone advice and information on general matters relating to Autism.
2. **Parent training:** Centre-based courses for families aimed at promoting a range of relevant skills.
3. **Parent consultation:** Advisory visit(s) and telephone advice to provide general advice and support to families.
4. **INSET (In Service Training):** Centre-based courses for pre-school professionals aimed at promoting the development of a range of relevant skills.
5. **School-based training:** Whole/part staff on-onsite tailored training for pre-school.
6. **Consultation with schools:** Advisory visit(s) telephone advice to provide general advice and support to school professionals.
7. **Transition/transfer support:** Range of support for pupils transitioning to formal education or transferring between educational phases. A range of support for pupils transferring to further educational, work or work placements is available post 16. Support may include training and advice to parents and professionals.

The WELB provides a number of autism specific classes at Key Stage 1. These classes provide support for pupils with a statement of special educational need, a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder and who are struggling with mainstream.

Autism: Western Education and Library Board

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education to detail the number of post-primary learning support and autism units that are in the Western Education and Library Board area.

(AQW 18010/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Western Education and Library Board that there is one post primary Learning Support Class in the Board's area.

Behavioural Support: Western Education and Library Board

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Education what support services the Western Education and Library Board provides for Severe Challenging Behaviour, both in mainstream and special needs placements; and to detail the staffing composition of these services and the role of the Specialist Behaviour Team within each service.

(AQW 18011/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I am advised by the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) that the Board has one Social Emotional and Behaviour Support Team (SEBD). The staffing composition of the SEBD Team is as follows.

Job Title	Number
Head of Behaviour Support Team	1
Assistant Advisory Officer	2
Advisory Teachers	2
Classroom Assistants	2
Outreach Teachers	6

The SEBD Support Team aims to provide advice and support on request from Principals to teachers in the management of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in nursery, primary, post-primary and special schools.

The SEBD Support Team provides staff development training at both out-centres and within schools to build the capacity of staff in the area of SEBD. It promotes the WELB policy of diversity and inclusion practices by contributing to the WELB INSET (In Service Training) Programme. Courses offered reflect the needs expressed by schools and current priorities identified by the Department of Education.

The Team support schools in developing and reviewing positive behaviour management policies including safe handling and risk assessment/management.

The Team works collaboratively with other Board Services and other relevant agencies including Health and Social Services personnel on the development and implementation of programmes of support for pupils with SEBD. The Team promotes a coordinated multi-disciplinary approach in relation to addressing the needs of children with SEBD.

The work of the SEBD Team includes:

- Consultation and advice;
- Telephone advice;
- Classroom observation;
- Attendance at Multi Agency Support Team meetings;
- Advising on resources;
- Advice on Individual Education Plan development;
- Whole School Training;
- Classroom Assistant training;
- Auxiliary Staff training (including lunchtime supervisors);
- Promoting parental involvement;
- Collaborative work with other WELB services and external agencies;
- Contributing to S.E.B.D management at a regional level;
- Behaviour Policy Review/Procedure;
- Training and advice on De-escalation & Diffusion Strategies/Anger Management;
- Nurturing approaches and strategies;
- Training on Safe Handling/Risk Assessment/Risk Management; and
- Re-integration support programmes.

Class Sizes: Caps

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education to outline the reasons for not setting a cap on class sizes in Primary 5 to 7. (AQW 18012/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department requires schools to keep classes for the youngest children (years 1 to 4 in primary school) at 30 or fewer pupils. The Education and Library Boards administer this policy and are responsible for providing any additional funding to primary schools to enable the policy to be achieved.

The reason for a cap on classes for our youngest pupils is that evidence indicates that smaller class sizes in early years learning can have a positive impact on outcomes. Research also indicates that it is the quality of teachers and the instruction they provide is the key influence on learning outcomes.

It is the Department's policy to give as much autonomy as possible to schools. In terms of class sizes for pupils in Year 5-7, School Boards of Governors have a degree of flexibility, afforded to them under the Local Management of Schools arrangements. The Board of Governors has responsibility for determining their school's staffing complement and for managing the school's education budget and this would include taking decisions on class sizes. This allows the schools' Boards of Governors to determine how they use their delegated funding to maximum effect in accordance with their school's specific needs and priorities.

A Levels and Leaving Certificates: Result Dates

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the impact that results for A Level and Leaving Certificate students arriving on different dates have on students applying for courses on both sides of the border and what steps he has taken to resolve this matter. (AQW 18018/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A level and the Leaving Certificate results are made available in mid August each year. However, the dates vary. Both release dates are linked to Bank Holiday weekends: the Leaving Certificate results published 10 weeks after the June Bank Holiday with A levels results are published two Thursdays before the August Bank Holiday. There is, therefore, a gap between the publications of the two sets of results. For example, in Summer 2012, GCE results were released to candidates on Thursday 16 August, while the Leaving Certificate results were released on Monday 13 August.

Each year CCEA GCE results are sent in advance to both the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) and the Central Applications Office (CAO). In Summer 2012 the results were sent to both on Thursday 9 August. In addition to CCEA arrangements, UCAS and CAO have procedures in place for all examinations data exchange where this is relevant. This means that both jurisdictions have procedures in place to take account of differences in release dates.

The variation in the date of the August bank holiday has caused challenges in the past. In 2009 the results issue date for A levels was later in August - 20 August. This caused concerns for some students applying for university places in the south, because the CAO results were available a week earlier. After this issue arose in 2009 it has been agreed across the GCE awarding organisations that results dates will not be so late again.

School Starting Age

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether any progress has been made on providing flexibility around the school starting age.

(AQW 18023/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have no plans to introduce flexibility to the school starting age at this time, but will keep this position under review. Whilst I am aware that we have one of the lowest school starting ages in Europe, the introduction of the Foundation Stage curriculum for pupils in Years 1 and 2 is already helping to address concerns about the young age at which our children start school.

The Foundation Stage curriculum is designed to allow teachers the freedom to reassert what has always been regarded as best practice i.e. that very young children should be allowed to learn at their own pace. At Foundation Stage it is not recommended that a child begins formal learning until teachers believe the child is ready. This focus on matching learning to a child's readiness is designed to ensure that every child can indeed fulfil his or her full potential.

The foundation stage provides teachers with greater flexibility to use their professional judgement and adapt their teaching to best meet the needs of their pupils and to provide for diagnostic assessment, which will provide greater opportunities for teachers to pick up earlier on pupils with particular difficulties.

In the Foundation Stage schools are required to provide opportunities for active learning through play and children are benefiting by being encouraged to learn through a wide variety of approaches. The use of play is recognised as a way to improve reading, writing and maths and stimulation through play in the early years is an important factor in the social and educational development of the child.

City & Guilds 6131 Certificate

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW 17170/11-15, in Northern Ireland, where can a student, who completed their PGCE Course in England, obtain their City and Guilds 6131 Certificate for Workshop Competence Course.

(AQW 18048/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is regrettable that the PGCE courses offered in England and elsewhere do not train students to the City and Guilds 6131 Certificate for Workshop Competence Course (C&G 6131) standard.

The C&G 6131 course ensures that, in order to teach the curriculum here, teachers of Technology & Design are competent in handling the tools used to work with resistant materials such as wood and plastics. It is included as a module of the PGCE course in the north of Ireland and is designed and run by the Belfast Education & Library Board. Although accredited by City & Guilds, this is not a mainstream course and cannot currently be accessed through, for example, a Further Education College. It is therefore currently only available to PGCE students here.

My Department and the Department for Employment and Learning previously funded C&G 6131 courses in 2010-11 for existing teachers and students who returned to work here having completed their PGCE Course in England.

The Department is currently reviewing provision of the C&G 6131 course to ascertain if it could be made available to those who have not received the appropriate training from their Teacher Education provider. The review will also consider how and where training might be provided and how it should be funded. No final decision has been made and further exploratory work with the Belfast Board and the Department for Employment and Learning will be needed.

Bus Passes: BT29 Area

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education how much has been spent on bus passes in the BT29 area in the last twelve months.

(AQW 18051/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed of the following by the North Eastern (NEELB) and South Eastern (SEELB) Education and Library Boards:

- (1) £969,290.04 has been spent on bus passes for eligible pupils in the BT29 area in the last twelve months - £696,795.47 by the NEELB and £272,494.57 by the SEELB.
- (2) The schools attended by children in the BT29 area in receipt of bus passes from both NEELB and SEELB in the last twelve months are:
 - Antrim Grammar School
 - Aquinas Grammar School
 - Ashfield Boy's School
 - Ballyclare High School
 - Ballyclare Secondary School
 - Ballymacrickett Primary School
 - Ballymena Academy
 - Belfast Metropolitan College - Castlereagh
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Gerald Moag Campus
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Titanic Quarter
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Tower Street
 - Belfast Metropolitan College - Whiterock Building
 - Belfast Royal Academy
 - Cambridge House Grammar
 - Christian Brothers Secondary School

- Colaiste Feirste
- Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Crumlin Integrated College
- De la Salle College
- Dominican College
- Edmund Rice College
- Fort Hill Integrated College
- Friends' School
- Hunterhouse College
- Laurelhill Community College
- Lismore Comprehensive
- Little Flower Girls School
- Lurgan Junior High School
- Methodist College
- Northern Regional College (Ballymena Campus)
- Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
- Parkhall Integrated College
- Rathmore Grammar School
- Royal Belfast Academical Institution
- Slemish Integrated College
- South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
- St Colman's Primary School
- St Colm's High School
- St Dominic's High School
- St Genevieve's High School
- St Joseph's PS Crumlin
- St Louis' Grammar School
- St Louise's Comprehensive College
- St Malachy's College
- St Mary's CBS Grammar School
- St Mary's High School
- St Michael's Grammar School
- St Patrick's Academy (Lisburn)
- St Patrick's Academy, Learning Support Centre
- St Patrick's College (Bearnageeha)
- St Paul's Junior High School
- St Rose's Dominican College
- Victoria College
- Wallace High School

- (3) the number of children in the BT29 area who claimed back money for their allocated bus passes, and the schools they attended in the last twelve months are:

101 pupils, 67 in the NEELB area and 34 in the SEELB area

- Antrim Grammar School
- Antrim Primary School
- Ballyclare High School
- Ballymacrickett Primary School
- Ballymacward Primary School
- Belfast Girls' Model School
- Belfast Metropolitan College - Gerald Moag Campus
- Belfast Royal Academy
- Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
- Cambridge House Grammar School
- Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Friends' School Preparatory
- Gaelscoil Gleann Darach (Crumlin)
- Hazelwood College
- Holy Child Primary School
- Hunterhouse College
- Loanends Primary School
- McKinney Primary School
- Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
- Oakwood Integrated Primary School
- Parkhall Integrated College
- Parkhall Primary School
- Roundtower Integrated Primary School
- Royal Belfast Academical Institution
- South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
- St Benedict's College
- St Colm's High School
- St Comgall's Primary School
- St Dominic's High School
- St Genevieve's High School
- St Joseph's Primary School (Crumlin)
- St Louise's Comprehensive College
- St Mary's CBS Grammar School
- St Malachy's College
- St Therese of Lisieux Primary School
- Straidhavern Primary School
- Templepatrick Primary School
- Wallace High School

Bus passes may only be exchanged for allowances in the period prior to Boards receiving Translink's invoice (in late October each year). In this way, Boards ensure they do not pay twice for any pupil wishing to exchange.

Bus Passes: BT29 Area

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education to list the schools attended by children, in the BT29 area, who received bus passes in the last twelve months.

(AQW 18052/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed of the following by the North Eastern (NEELB) and South Eastern (SEELB) Education and Library Boards:

- (4) £969,290.04 has been spent on bus passes for eligible pupils in the BT29 area in the last twelve months - £696,795.47 by the NEELB and £272,494.57 by the SEELB.

- (5) The schools attended by children in the BT29 area in receipt of bus passes from both NEELB and SEELB in the last twelve months are:
- Antrim Grammar School
 - Aquinas Grammar School
 - Ashfield Boy's School
 - Ballyclare High School
 - Ballyclare Secondary School
 - Ballymacrickett Primary School
 - Ballymena Academy
 - Belfast Metropolitan College - Castlereagh
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Gerald Moag Campus
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Titanic Quarter
 - Belfast Metropolitan College – Tower Street
 - Belfast Metropolitan College - Whiterock Building
 - Belfast Royal Academy
 - Cambridge House Grammar
 - Christian Brothers Secondary School
 - Colaiste Feirste
 - Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
 - Crumlin Integrated College
 - De la Salle College
 - Dominican College
 - Edmund Rice College
 - Fort Hill Integrated College
 - Friends' School
 - Hunterhouse College
 - Laurelhill Community College
 - Lismore Comprehensive
 - Little Flower Girls School
 - Lurgan Junior High School
 - Methodist College
 - Northern Regional College (Ballymena Campus)
 - Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
 - Parkhall Integrated College
 - Rathmore Grammar School
 - Royal Belfast Academical Institution
 - Slemish Integrated College
 - South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
 - St Colman's Primary School
 - St Colm's High School
 - St Dominic's High School
 - St Genevieve's High School
 - St Joseph's PS Crumlin
 - St Louis' Grammar School
 - St Louise's Comprehensive College
 - St Malachy's College
 - St Mary's CBS Grammar School
 - St Mary's High School
 - St Michael's Grammar School
 - St Patrick's Academy (Lisburn)
 - St Patrick's Academy, Learning Support Centre
 - St Patrick's College (Bearnageeha)
 - St Paul's Junior High School
 - St Rose's Dominican College
 - Victoria College
 - Wallace High School
- (6) the number of children in the BT29 area who claimed back money for their allocated bus passes, and the schools they attended in the last twelve months are:
- 101 pupils, 67 in the NEELB area and 34 in the SEELB area
- Antrim Grammar School
 - Antrim Primary School
 - Ballyclare High School
 - Ballymacrickett Primary School
 - Ballymacward Primary School
 - Belfast Girls' Model School
 - Belfast Metropolitan College - Gerald Moag Campus
 - Belfast Royal Academy
 - Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
 - Cambridge House Grammar School
 - Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
 - Friends' School Preparatory
 - Gaelscoil Gleann Darach (Crumlin)
 - Hazelwood College
 - Holy Child Primary School
 - Hunterhouse College
 - Loanends Primary School
 - McKinney Primary School
 - Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
 - Oakwood Integrated Primary School
 - Parkhall Integrated College
 - Parkhall Primary School
 - Roundtower Integrated Primary School
 - Royal Belfast Academical Institution
 - South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
 - St Benedict's College
 - St Colm's High School
 - St Comgall's Primary School
 - St Dominic's High School
 - St Genevieve's High School
 - St Joseph's Primary School (Crumlin)
 - St Louise's Comprehensive College
 - St Mary's CBS Grammar School
 - St Malachy's College
 - St Therese of Lisieux Primary School
 - Straidhavern Primary School
 - Templepatrick Primary School
 - Wallace High School

Bus passes may only be exchanged for allowances in the period prior to Boards receiving Translink's invoice (in late October each year). In this way, Boards ensure they do not pay twice for any pupil wishing to exchange.

Bus Passes: BT29 Area

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education, in the last twelve months, how many children in the BT29 area claimed back money for their allocated bus passes; and what schools they attended.

(AQW 18054/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have been informed of the following by the North Eastern (NEELB) and South Eastern (SEELB) Education and Library Boards:

(7) £969,290.04 has been spent on bus passes for eligible pupils in the BT29 area in the last twelve months - £696,795.47 by the NEELB and £272,494.57 by the SEELB.

(8) The schools attended by children in the BT29 area in receipt of bus passes from both NEELB and SEELB in the last twelve months are:

- Antrim Grammar School
- Aquinas Grammar School
- Ashfield Boy's School
- Ballyclare High School
- Ballyclare Secondary School
- Ballymacrickett Primary School
- Ballymena Academy
- Belfast Metropolitan College - Castlereagh
- Belfast Metropolitan College – Gerald Moag Campus
- Belfast Metropolitan College – Titanic Quarter
- Belfast Metropolitan College – Tower Street
- Belfast Metropolitan College - Whiterock Building
- Belfast Royal Academy
- Cambridge House Grammar
- Christian Brothers Secondary School
- Colaiste Feirste
- Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Crumlin Integrated College
- De la Salle College
- Dominican College
- Edmund Rice College
- Fort Hill Integrated College
- Friends' School
- Hunterhouse College
- Laurelhill Community College
- Lismore Comprehensive
- Little Flower Girls School
- Lurgan Junior High School
- Methodist College
- Northern Regional College (Ballymena Campus)
- Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
- Parkhall Integrated College
- Rathmore Grammar School
- Royal Belfast Academical Institution
- Slemish Integrated College
- South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
- St Colman's Primary School
- St Colm's High School
- St Dominic's High School
- St Genevieve's High School
- St Joseph's PS Crumlin
- St Louis' Grammar School
- St Louise's Comprehensive College
- St Malachy's College
- St Mary's CBS Grammar School
- St Mary's High School
- St Michael's Grammar School
- St Patrick's Academy (Lisburn)
- St Patrick's Academy, Learning Support Centre
- St Patrick's College (Bearnageeha)
- St Paul's Junior High School
- St Rose's Dominican College
- Victoria College
- Wallace High School

(9) the number of children in the BT29 area who claimed back money for their allocated bus passes, and the schools they attended in the last twelve months are:

101 pupils, 67 in the NEELB area and 34 in the SEELB area

- Antrim Grammar School
- Antrim Primary School
- Ballyclare High School
- Ballymacrickett Primary School
- Ballymacward Primary School
- Belfast Girls' Model School
- Belfast Metropolitan College - Gerald Moag Campus
- Belfast Royal Academy
- Bunscoil Phobal Feirste
- Cambridge House Grammar School
- Crumlin Controlled Integrated Primary School
- Friends' School Preparatory
- Gaelscoil Gleann Darach (Crumlin)
- Hazelwood College
- Holy Child Primary School
- Hunterhouse College
- Loanends Primary School
- McKinney Primary School
- Northern Regional College (Newtownabbey Campus)
- Oakwood Integrated Primary School
- Parkhall Integrated College
- Parkhall Primary School
- Roundtower Integrated Primary School
- Royal Belfast Academical Institution
- South Eastern Regional College (Lisburn)
- St Benedict's College

- St Colm's High School
- St Comgall's Primary School
- St Dominic's High School
- St Genevieve's High School
- St Joseph's Primary School (Crumlin)
- St Louise's Comprehensive College
- St Mary's CBS Grammar School
- St Malachy's College
- St Therese of Lisieux Primary School
- Straidhavern Primary School
- Templepatrick Primary School
- Wallace High School

Bus passes may only be exchanged for allowances in the period prior to Boards receiving Translink's invoice (in late October each year). In this way, Boards ensure they do not pay twice for any pupil wishing to exchange.

Controlled Sector: Support Body Membership

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education (i) how the membership of the Controlled Sectoral Body was originally selected; (ii) whether the membership has since changed; and (iii) to detail (a) why; and (b) how the new members were selected.
(AQW 18085/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: In September 2012, having consulted with the Controlled Sector, the Transferors and political bodies, I agreed the membership of the Working Group that will take forward the establishment of the Sectoral Support Body for the Controlled Sector. There has been no change in the Group's membership since.

The Working Group's members are not the membership of the Sectoral Body. The membership of the Body shall be established as its development progresses.

Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Education for an update on the current position of the new build for Holy Family Primary School in Magherafelt.
(AQW 18088/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I recognise a new school build at Holy Family Primary School, Magherafelt, remains a priority for investment.

I will continue to examine the case for capital investment and intend to make a further announcement in the early New Year. While I would like to be in the position to fund everything that needs doing now, I must work within the budget available.

Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for an update on the Education Advisory Working group; and to detail the group's terms of reference.
(AQW 18089/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Ministerial Advisory Group was appointed on 19 July 2012 and was asked to report its findings to me by 1 February 2013. No further update is available.

The Terms of Reference can be accessed on the Department's website:

http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/shared_education/shared-education-ministerial-advisory-group.htm

School Networks

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the effectiveness of schools coming together into networks in relation to improving (i) pupil outcomes; and (ii) the quality of teaching and learning.
(AQW 18093/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: I have stated on many occasions that Area Learning Communities can play a valuable role in ensuring that the educational needs of pupils are met. That is why I established a Strategic Development Fund to support Area Learning Communities in improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in the key areas of literacy and numeracy.

Area Learning Communities provide a local forum for curricular planning, more easily avoiding duplication of provision in small classes and providing access for all pupils to a full range of courses from a broad and balanced curriculum. They also provide a valuable opportunity to share expertise and best practice in terms of teaching and learning.

Every post-primary school is a member of an Area Learning Community and is able to analyse an increasingly sophisticated range of information about the associated benefits for pupils, including the outcomes for pupils of courses which may not previously have been available to these young people. Ensuring that every pupil achieves to their potential, is engaged with their own learning, can see clear progression pathways, and is supported through timely, high quality Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance is an essential focus for every school and every Area Learning Community.

Integrated Education: Assessment of Benefits

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the (i) economic; and (ii) societal benefits of integrated education.

(AQW 18094/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education is required, by law, to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education and I remain committed to fulfilling this duty.

The Programme for Government recognises the particular contribution of education generally to growing a sustainable economy and to tackling disadvantage and building a strong and shared economy. Delivering long-term, sustainable economic growth and building a fairer, more inclusive shared society requires investment in the education and development of our young people. Integrated education plays an important role in helping to deliver these goals.

Department for Employment and Learning

Further Education Colleges: Budgets

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the budget of each Further Education College in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 17473/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): Recurrent grant funding for the six Further Education (FE) Colleges is provided on an academic year basis through the further education funding model with allocations made in line with Departmental priorities. The recurrent grant provides funding to enable colleges to deliver mainstream further education provision up to, and including, level 3, essential skills provision and higher education provision.

The table below details the recurrent grant funding allocated to the six further education colleges for the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years.

College	2009/10 Grant Allocation	2010/11 Grant Allocation	2011/12 Grant Allocation
Belfast Metropolitan College	35,440,129	34,424,765	33,230,416
North West Regional College	22,936,101	23,297,739	22,757,139
Northern Regional College	22,614,401	22,026,775	21,240,121
South Eastern Regional College	25,418,827	25,323,564	24,396,470
South West College	14,698,345	16,105,037	16,028,501
Southern Regional College	24,291,896	27,022,121	26,252,441
Total	145,339,699	148,200,001	143,905,088

In addition to the recurrent grant funding, the Department provides capital funding to the further education colleges. The table below details the capital funding provided to the six further education colleges for the 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12 academic years which totalled £84,975,067 for capital projects over this period.

College	2009/10 Capital Funding	2010/11 Capital Funding	2011/12 Capital Funding
Belfast Metropolitan College	7,086,174	795,488	11,383,860
North West Regional College	7,309,759	8,083,685	324,458
Northern Regional College	4,019,933	6,097,944	45,891
South Eastern Regional College	6,973,474	4,179,317	24,566,798
South West College	3,917,670	139,931	0
Southern Regional College	50,685	0	0
Total	29,357,695	19,296,365	36,321,007

This capital expenditure includes £23,720,000 in respect of private finance initiative "bullet" payments to South Eastern Regional College for campuses at East Down and Lisburn. The "bullet" payments are lump sums which reduce the annual payments made under Public Private Partnership procurements.

Engineering: Degree Places

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many degree places are available in each of the main divisions of engineering disciplines.

(AQW 17481/11-15)

Dr Farry: As the Department does not hold the information requested, my officials contacted Queen's University and the University of Ulster. The information provided by the universities is attached at Annex A.

Annex A

2012/13 Engineering Enrolments for Queen's University Belfast and the University of Ulster

In academic year 2012/13, Queen's University and the University of Ulster had the following full-time undergraduate enrolments onto engineering courses as set out in the table below:

Queen's University		University of Ulster	
Subject	Num.	Subject	Num.
Mechanical Engineering	144	Biomedical Engineering	156
Aerospace Engineering	38	Building/Building Services/Construction Engineering	337
Civil Engineering	72	Civil Engineering	191
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	70	Electronic Engineering	113
Chemical Engineering	60	Engineering Management	58
		Mechanical/Mechatronic Engineering	295
		Software Engineering	50
Total	384		1200

NB: The University of Ulster figures do not include students registered on Technology and Design and Computer Science (incl. Software Development) programmes.

Nursing Students at University of Ulster, Magee: Religious Background

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of (i) Protestant; and (ii) Catholic students enrolled in a nursing course at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster in each of the last five years.

(AQW 17501/11-15)

Dr Farry: The religion of NI domiciled students enrolled in nursing courses at all NI Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and specifically at the Magee Campus of the University of Ulster in each of the last five years are detailed in the tables below:

	All NI HEIs				
	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2006/07	1,325	1,530	95	1,635	4,585
2007/08	1,255	1,525	135	1,305	4,220
2008/09	1,285	1,500	140	1,145	4,065
2009/10	1,470	1,840	150	735	4,195
2010/11	1,425	1,770	160	325	3,680

	Magee Campus only				
	Protestant	Catholic	Other	Not Known/ available	Total
2006/07	110	365	5	5	490
2007/08	110	330	0	10	455
2008/09	105	325	0	10	445
2009/10	145	385	5	10	545
2010/11	155	405	10	10	585

Source: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Notes:

- 1 Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5 and therefore may not sum to totals.
- 2 The latest available data are for 2010/11.
- 3 Information on religion at the NI HEIs is only collected for NI domiciled students.

Student Migration: BIC Member Administrations

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what work his Department is taking forward as a result of the British Irish Council sectoral report on the Implications of Student Migration between BIC Member Administrations.
(AQW 17544/11-15)

Dr Farry: I understand that the final report on the Implications of Student Migration between the British Irish Council member administrations is due to be published in early 2013.

Officials from my Department have been working with a Demography Sectoral Group and have contributed text and data to the above report.

The group recognise that changes in policy, particularly in relation to student fees, will have a significant impact on Northern Ireland students as nearly 30% of Northern Ireland domiciled full-time undergraduate students study in other UK administrations. My Department will, therefore, continue to monitor the potential impact future policies may have on student demography.

Labour Relations Agency: Referrals

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many individual disputes have been referred to the Labour Relations Agency in each of the last three years.
(AQW 17581/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information sought is recorded in the following table.

Year	Cases received
2009/10	9,386
2010/11	14,327
2011/12	4,366

(Note that an individual case may include more than one employment law jurisdiction e.g. a single case could include a complaint of unfair dismissal and sex discrimination.)

Labour Relations Agency: Settlements before Tribunal

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how many disputes referred to the Labour Relations Agency have been settled before reaching Industrial Tribunal in each of the last three years.
(AQW 17583/11-15)

Dr Farry: The information sought is recorded in the following table.

Year	Cases Reaching Conclusion	LRA Conciliated Settlement	Withdrawn	To Tribunal
2009/10	6,710	2,803	3,070	837
2010/11	18,053	12,075	5,213	765
2011/12	5,783	2,930	1,979	874

(Note that an individual case may include more than one employment law jurisdiction e.g. a single case could include a complaint of unfair dismissal and sex discrimination.)

Labour Relations Agency: Lowest Settlement Figure

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the lowest amount paid in settlement in relation to cases referred to the Labour Relations Agency in the last three years.
(AQW 17584/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Labour Relations Agency maintains a policy of confidentiality in relation to its dispute resolution services. Settlement figures are therefore not recorded on the Agency's case management system and it is not possible to provide the information sought.

Labour Relations Agency: Highest Settlement Figure

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the highest amount paid in settlement in relation to cases referred to the Labour Relations Agency in the last three years.

(AQW 17585/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Labour Relations Agency maintains a policy of confidentiality in relation to its dispute resolution services. Settlement figures are therefore not recorded on the Agency's case management system and it is not possible to provide the information sought.

Institute of Professional Legal Studies: Student Enrolment

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students, broken down by gender, who have enrolled in the Institute of Professional Legal Studies as (a) solicitors and (b) barristers, in each of the last ten years.

(AQW 17649/11-15)

Dr Farry: As my Department does not hold this information, my officials contacted Queen's University Belfast for a response. The University has provided the information attached at Annex A.

Annex A

Queen's University Belfast - the Institute of Professional Legal Studies

The number of places for trainee solicitors and barristers at the Institute of Professional Legal Studies, in the last 10 years, is set out in the two tables below.

In addition to ordinary fulltime places, each year the Institute admits some students who are already qualified as solicitors or barristers but who wish to transfer to the other side of the profession and this cohort will attend only those courses as required by the professional body. In addition, the Institute also admits some trainees who come as 'recommended' by the Law Society or Inn of Court.

Table One: Total trainee barrister intake to Queen's Institute of Professional Legal Studies, broken down by gender, for each of the last ten years.

Barrister Intake	M	F	Total
2012-2013	13	19	32
2011-2012	21	16	37
2010-2011	15	19	34
2009-2010	16	15	31
2008-2009	23	13	36
2007-2008	11	16	27
2006-2007	12	15	27
2005-2006	14	13	27
2004-2005	17	11	28
2003-2004	8	21	29
Total	150	158	308

Table Two: Total trainee solicitor intake to Queen's Institute of Professional Legal Studies, broken down by gender, for each of the last ten years.

Solicitor Intake	M	F	Total
2012-2013	42	69	111
2011-2012	46	71	117
2010-2011	46	69	115
2009-2010	55	77	132
2008-2009	43	83	126

Solicitor Intake	M	F	Total
2007-2008	43	74	117
2006-2007	43	68	111
2005-2006	37	70	107
2004-2005	35	65	100
2003-2004	23	81	104
Total	413	727	1140

Tribunals: Total Amount Paid

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the total amount paid by employers as a result of settling in tribunal cases in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17700/11-15)

Dr Farry: This information is not available as settlements are agreed between the parties themselves or with the assistance of the Labour Relations Agency's confidential dispute resolution services.

Tribunals: Average Settlement Figure

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning what was the average settlement figure excluding costs for employers who settled in tribunal cases, in each of the three years.

(AQW 17702/11-15)

Dr Farry: This information is not available as settlements are agreed between the parties themselves or with the assistance of the Labour Relations Agency's confidential dispute resolution services.

Tribunals: Costs Awarded against Respondent

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning on how many occasions were costs awarded against the employer in tribunal cases in each of the three years.

(AQW 17703/11-15)

Dr Farry: The figures requested are as follows:

Year	Costs awarded against respondent
2010	0
2011	1
2012	0

Tribunals: Costs Awarded against Claimant

Mr Ross asked the Minister for Employment and Learning on how many occasions were costs awarded against the employee in tribunal cases, in each of the three years.

(AQW 17704/11-15)

Dr Farry: The figures requested are as follows:

Year	Costs awarded against claimant
2010	5
2011	3
2012	4

There was also one occasion, in 2011, on which costs were awarded against a claimant's representative.

Republic of Ireland Universities: Northern Ireland Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning (i) how many students from Northern Ireland have enrolled at universities in the Republic of Ireland in each of the last 10 years and; (ii) who pays their tuition fees.

(AQW 17788/11-15)

Dr Farry:

- (i) The table below details the number of Northern Ireland domiciled students who enrolled on full-time undergraduate courses at institutions in the Republic of Ireland in each of the last ten years

Academic Year	Number of NI domiciled students enrolled on full-time undergraduate courses at institutions in the Republic of Ireland
2001/02	1,065
2002/03	1,070
2003/04	1,055
2004/05	935
2005/06	900
2006/07	860
2007/08	770
2008/09	765
2009/10	790
2010/11	710

Source: Higher Education Authority, ROI

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest 5

- (ii) Under the free fees Initiative, the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland meets the cost of tuition fees for eligible students who are attending full-time undergraduate courses.

EU students, including those from Northern Ireland, are charged an annual registration fee (€2,250 in academic year 2012/13). Northern Ireland domiciled students studying in the Republic of Ireland benefit from special student support arrangements in that the cost of their registration fee is currently met in full by my Department.

From academic year 2013/14, my Department will no longer meet the full cost of the registration fee. Instead, new Northern Ireland domiciled students commencing full-time undergraduate courses in the Republic of Ireland will be eligible for a loan to cover the full cost of the registration fee (€2,500 in academic year 2013/14).

Republic of Ireland Colleges: Northern Ireland Students

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail (i) how many students from Northern Ireland have enrolled at colleges in the Republic of Ireland in each of the last 10 years; and (ii) who pays their tuition fees.

(AQW 17789/11-15)

Dr Farry: My Department does not hold any enrolment data in relation to students from Northern Ireland studying at colleges in the Republic of Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills has advised that the Republic of Ireland does not charge tuition fees for further education provision.

Students from Irish Republic: Further and Higher Education Courses in Northern Ireland

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of students with home addresses in the Irish Republic currently attend Further and Higher Education courses in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 17843/11-15)

Dr Farry: There were 2,875 students enrolled in professional and technical courses at the Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges in 2011/12 who have the Irish Republic as their country of domicile – 465 of which were studying a Higher Education course. There were 4,285 students enrolled at Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in 2010/11 that have the Irish Republic as their country of domicile.

Sources: Further Education Statistical Record and Higher Education Statistics Agency

Notes:

- 1 The latest available data for the Further Education Colleges are for academic year 2011/12.
- 2 The latest available data for Higher Education Institutions are for academic year 2010/11. 2011/12 data will be available in January 2013.
- 3 Data are rounded to the nearest 5 in line with data disclosure protocols.

Departmental Private Office

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the cost of running his Ministerial Private Office in the last financial year.

(AQW 17867/11-15)

Dr Farry: In the financial year 2011 to 2012, the cost incurred for the running of my Ministerial Private Office was £169,851. This covers the full salary cost to the Department for administrative staff, along with general running costs associated with the office.

These costs cover the period from 1 April 2011; it is not feasible to break this down to cover only the period since I took up office on 16th May.

University of Ulster: Teacher Training

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning whether he has any plans to provide teacher training at the University of Ulster in Coleraine for those in northern areas of Northern Ireland and in Belfast for those in southern areas.

(AQW 17897/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is the Department of Education which allocates the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) places to each of the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

There are five ITE providers in Northern Ireland: Queen's University, the University of Ulster, the Open University, St. Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College. The University of Ulster offers Primary and Post-Primary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses at its Coleraine campus. Therefore, with all of the above institutions catering for students from across Northern Ireland and further afield, there is already extensive ITE provision in Northern Ireland.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect his Department.

(AQW 17926/11-15)

Dr Farry: It is not anticipated that the late payment directive will have a significant impact on the Department as prompt payment policy already forms a key part of the Department's financial procedures.

Unless otherwise stated in a contract, the Department aims to make payments to suppliers within 30 days of receipt of goods and services, which is in line with the provisions of the directive. In addition, the Department is committed to making payments to suppliers within 10 days in order to help local business in the current economic climate.

The Department monitors its own performance against 30 day and 10 day targets on a monthly basis. In the year ended 31 March 2012, 96% of invoices from suppliers were paid by the Department within 30 days and 87% within 10 days. No compensation was incurred in respect of late payments.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Employment and Learning how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17927/11-15)

Dr Farry: The Department's arm's-length bodies have performed as follows on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets:

	Year ended 31 March 2012
CITB – ConstructionSkills Northern Ireland	100%
Labour Relations Agency	95.5%

Ulster Supported Employment Limited receives normal credit terms from suppliers and pays promptly on the 20th day of the month, subsequent to the receipt of the invoice. With regards to the Further Education Colleges, performance for the year ended 31 July 2012 was as follows:

Belfast Metropolitan College	60%
Northern Regional College	77%
North West Regional College	92%
South Eastern Regional College	78%
Southern Regional College	89%
South West Regional College	59%

Stranmillis College uses the credit terms advised by suppliers when provided, otherwise the practice is to pay suppliers in the next available payment run (two payment runs per month).

No sector has been paid more quickly than others.

Teacher Training: Provision

Mr McClarty asked the Minister for Employment and Learning for his assessment of whether teacher training provision is best served by the current locations and number of places in the University of Ulster Coleraine, Stranmillis University College and St Mary's University College.

(AQW 17935/11-15)

Dr Farry: There are five Initial Teacher Education providers in Northern Ireland: Queen's University, the University of Ulster, the Open University, St. Mary's University College and Stranmillis University College. It is the Department of Education which allocates the Initial Teacher Education places to each of the providers. In the case of the University of Ulster, the University determines the campus in which the places are located. My Department is responsible for funding the places allocated by the Department of Education. I believe that the training of teachers in Northern Ireland in the current system is inefficient and that the funding could be used better by the teacher training institutions if they were prepared to move towards a more shared and integrated system and I initiated a two-stage study of the teacher education infrastructure to look at this. The first stage of the study considers the financial stability and sustainability of the two university colleges. The second stage will set out options for a more shared and integrated system for the delivery and funding of teacher education.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Bombardier Announcement

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the benefits of the recent announcement by Bombardier in relation to the new plane component orders.

(AQW 17471/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Bombardier Aerospace has announced a number of significant business aircraft orders during recent months including orders for Challenger business aircraft, and last week, a major order from VistaJet, a Swiss-based luxury private jet operator. This is the largest business aircraft sale in Bombardier's history and is valued at approximately US\$3.1 billion for 56 Global business jets. The value of the order could increase to US\$7.8 billion if VistaJet exercises the options it has taken on a further 86 Global aircraft.

This was a record order for Bombardier in Belfast, which plays a major role in the Global aircraft programme and is responsible for the design, development and manufacture of a range of parts for the aircraft, including the forward fuselages, engine nacelles, horizontal stabilisers and other components. In fact, Bombardier Belfast plays a major role in the business jet sector, an important world aircraft market, which Bombardier Aerospace leads.

This major order from VistaJet helps to secure Bombardier's long-term future, with deliveries taking place over the next two to four years, and underpins around 900 jobs within the company's Northern Ireland operations, along with positive spin-off benefits to Bombardier's extensive local supply chain. Some 25 suppliers to Bombardier in Northern Ireland are involved in the Global aircraft programme.

The VistaJet announcement was followed just over a week later by an order from Delta Air Lines for Bombardier's CRJ900 NextGen regional jets. Bombardier in Northern Ireland will once again benefit from this order, given the significant role it plays in the CRJ900 NextGen programme. This order is a further vote of confidence by customers in Bombardier's products, and in the skills and capabilities of its workforce here in Northern Ireland.

The UK has 17% of the world market for aerospace and this makes us the largest aerospace industry in Europe and globally second only to the United States. Northern Ireland's share of UK aerospace output is over 8%, which places us significantly above our share of the UK population. The industry here employs over 8,000 people and contributes close to 12% of manufactured exports.

As our largest manufacturing employer, Bombardier's success in the business jet market, such as through the VistaJet order, is not only good for the company's extensive operations in Northern Ireland, but is also good for the local manufacturing economy and export sales.

Invest Northern Ireland continues to work closely with Bombardier to maximise the wider economic impact of its aircraft programmes here. I wish the company continued success and welcome the contribution its investments are making to Northern Ireland's prosperity.

Engineering: Graduate Opportunities

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what systems his Department has put in place to offer engineering graduates business start-up and self-employment opportunities.

(AQW 17480/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's Regional Start is focused on encouraging potential entrepreneurs (including graduates) to produce a business plan as one of the key early steps to starting a business and moving into self employment.

The key aims of Regional Start are:

- To raise the overall number and quality of business starts per annum in Northern Ireland;
- To deliver an accessible service that delivers on Invest NI's equality and diversity agenda, including females, young people who are NEETS and individuals living in NRAs, and thereby contribute to Invest NI's Job Fund scheme; and
- To ensure the full integration of Invest NI's "Northern Ireland Business Information Portal" – online support into the offering www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk.

In addition Invest NI's new Propel programme is aimed at fast tracking innovative, high growth potential start ups that have the potential to operate on a global basis. This one year programme provides entrepreneurs with high quality training, one to one mentoring, workshops, networking opportunities and financial support.

The programme, which will be delivered by XCell Partners (Newry) on behalf of Invest NI, is currently open for applications, with the first of three programmes starting in March 2013.

Unanswered Question

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why AQW 11415/11-15 has not yet been answered; and to provide the answer to this question.

(AQW 17522/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As Energy Minister I regularly meet with senior representatives from energy companies to discuss energy policy. Since 10/6/2008 until 9/5/2012 I have met with representatives from the following energy companies:- Kelman/GE, Phoenix Gas, NIEH, EST, Gaelectric, Carbon Trust, Viridian, Kedco Energy, AES Kilroot, BGE & Storenergy, Centre for Competitiveness Energy Forum, SONI, Mutual Energy, Lunar Energy, SWEG, SEAT, Coolkeeragh Power, Kingspan Renewables, Evermore Renewable Energy, People Powered Renewable Energy, Greengen Solutions Ltd, ESB, SSE Ireland, NIE, Dong Energy, Smartgrid Ireland, Rural Generation, BGI, Calor Gas, Lightsource Renewable Energy.

During this time I have attended the following events/conferences:- Irish Wind Energy Association Conference, Northern Ireland Energy Forum, Leuven Institute Energy Conference, SERC/Action Renewables Energy Efficiency Fair, CIGRE Low Carbon Power Systems Seminar, launch of Biomara Marine Energy Research Project, Northern Ireland Energy Forum, Energy Institute Dinner, Marine Energy & Smartgrid Workshop, Quo Vadis Conference, Isles Conference. My office does not hold details of who covered the cost of these events.

Delay to answering this question was due to the considerable amount of work involved in collating the details.

Market Coupling

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what work is ongoing or planned with her counterparts in Great Britain in respect of electricity infrastructure and the EU Commission's initiative on Market Coupling.

(AQW 17543/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department participates in a formal UK/Ireland Steering Committee alongside the Department of Energy and Climate Change, Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, Ofgem and the Regulators in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The Committee will meet on a quarterly or four-monthly basis as required. Its remit is to consider overarching policy and legislative issues for the UK and Ireland related to the Internal European Market for Electricity.

A75: Improvements

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what steps she has taken, or plans to take, with the Scottish government to promote and encourage improvements to the A75 road, given the important role of investment in capital infrastructure to support and promote economic growth.

(AQW 17603/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Northern Ireland Economic Strategy recognises the importance of a modern and sustainable economic infrastructure to support economic growth and help realise our 2030 vision for the economy. The infrastructure theme is about ensuring improved linkages within Northern Ireland, as well as improved connectivity, including on a North-South and East-West basis.

There is no doubt that the A75 is an essential route to the British mainland from Northern Ireland. It is important for our businesses, particularly those in the haulage industry who use it as an entry point into GB and across to Europe.

Although I have not had any direct discussions with Ministers in the Scottish Government regarding the A75, I am aware that the First Minister and deputy First Minister have had informal discussions with the First Minister of Scotland on the issue. In addition, DRD have advised that the Minister for Regional Development has had discussions with his Scottish counterpart in the margins of a recent British Irish Council meeting in Cardiff.

DRD have also advised that there has been ongoing contact between DRD officials and their counterparts in London and Scotland about the importance of having the A75 included on the core Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T). This matter has also been a feature of ongoing lobbying with the European Institutions on the draft TEN-T regulation.

Bangor to Holywood Coastal Path: Lighting

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether installing lighting on the Holywood coastal path would increase tourism.

(AQW 17611/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Neither my Department nor the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has carried out such an assessment. This would primarily be an issue for North Down Borough Council in conjunction with The Northern Ireland Environment Agency.

My Department, through the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, and Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland currently promote The North Down Coastal Path on www.discovernorthernireland.com and www.walkni.com. The two websites have received over one million visitors in the last six months, showing how important these websites are in promoting Northern Ireland.

Foreign Direct Investment: ICT Sector

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many Foreign Direct Investment visits have been made in the Information and Communications Technology sector within the last calendar year.

(AQW 17633/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI reports on visits on a full financial year basis following a validation process with results published at year end. As a result, visits from April 2012 are not yet available.

In the last full financial year 2011/12 (1st April 2011 to 31st March 2012), Invest Northern Ireland facilitated 55 visits to Northern Ireland by inward investors where their potential projects were primarily focused on Information and Communications Technology (ICT).

This figure discounts visits by potential investors whose projects included some ICT requirement but ultimately centred on skills required for other sectors, e.g. financial services, business services, renewable sectors, etc.

Wind Turbines

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the number of (i) 0kW – 50kW; (ii) 50kW – 100kW; (iii) 100kW – 200kW and (iv) 200kW – 250kW single wind turbines contributing to the reported 25MW of installed capacity at small scale level as referred to by her officials at the Committee for Enterprise, Trade and Investment meeting on Thursday 15 November 2012.

(AQW 17648/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The figure of 25MW of installed capacity was provided by NIE and was the position at July 2012. The Department understands that this figure is comprised of small scale onshore wind, hydro and biomass generating stations. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of the NIE figure for onshore wind as requested, however live and preliminary accreditations for generating stations under the Northern Ireland Renewables Obligation are provided in table 1:

Table 1: Accreditations for small scale onshore wind under the NIRO at 7 December 2012

Live and Preliminary Accreditations under the NIRO		
Installed Capacity	Number of stations	Total Capacity
0 -50kW	377	3MW
51kW -100kW	20	1.6MW
101kW -200kW	13	1.7MW
201kW -250kW	28	6.6MW
Total	438	12.9MW

Source: Ofgem Renewables and CHP Register

Invest NI: Salary of Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline (i) why; (ii) when; and (iii) by how much the salary of the Chief Executive of Invest NI was recently increased, and what is the new salary level.

(AQW 17664/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- i The Board of Invest NI sought to renegotiate the remuneration package of the CEO of Invest NI as a result of the changing public sector approach to Performance Related Pay.
- ii. The review was concluded in September 2012, following completion of the Review of Senior Civil Service salaries across the NICS.
- iii. As a result of the renegotiation the previous remuneration of the CEO was reduced from potential earnings of £208,000 pa to one of £190,000 pa fixed.

Invest NI: Salary of Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether a reported increase of £30,000 in the salary of the Chief Executive of Invest NI is compatible with the Executive's stance on pay restraint in the public sector.

(AQW 17666/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes.

Invest NI: Salary Guidelines

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what guidelines exist in regard to the salary levels, and any increase therein, of senior executives of Invest NI.

(AQW 17669/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Senior executives of Invest NI are subject to the terms and conditions, including salary levels, as applicable to the wider NICS senior staff.

Provision for future increases are in line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Reform of arrangements for Senior Civil Service Pay and Pay Strategy 2012 and 2013, which is available on the DFP website.

www.dfpni.gov.uk/2012_scs_pay_award_strategy_final_version.pdf

Invest NI: Salary of Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how much performance related pay the Chief Executive of Invest NI has (i) been awarded and (ii) received, since coming into office.

(AQW 17705/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Chief Executive of Invest NI has

- (i) been awarded -

Following an annual assessment by the board, of the performance of the Chief Executive against an extensive and definitive set of objectives and targets, amounts totalling £117,000 have been earned.

- (ii) received, since coming into office -

Last year, the Chief Executive made it very clear that he would not be accepting any performance related elements earned and was contractually entitled to since taking up the post, pending the outcome of the Review of Northern Ireland Senior Civil Service pay and also requested that the overall remuneration package of the post should be considered in line with the outcomes and principles of the Review. The board subsequently sought agreement from the Chief Executive to renegotiate his contract and this has now been completed. In line with the principles of the Review, the CEO's revised package does not contain any provision for performance related pay.

Non-departmental Public Bodies: Chief Executives

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the remuneration package for the Chief Executives of each of her Department's Non Departmental Public Bodies and what changes have been made to these packages in the last three years.

(AQW 17727/11-15)

Mrs Foster: This information is in the public domain via the NDPB Annual Reports and Accounts, specifically the Remuneration reports.

The remuneration figures for Chief Executives and how they are set, are reported in each of their respective Annual Reports.

http://www.investni.com/index/about/what_we_do/corporate_plans_and_annual_reports.htm

<http://www.nitb.com/AboutNITB/CorporatePlansReportsPolicies/AnnualReportsAccounts.aspx>

<http://www.hseni.gov.uk/about-hseni/corporate-publications.htm>

http://www.consumercouncil.org.uk/publications/?search_archive=Annual+Accounts&search_type=any&start_dateMonth=06&start_dateYear=1998&end_dateMonth=12&end_dateYear=2012&x=24&y=8

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for a breakdown of the monies spent (i) reviewing; (ii) reporting on; and (iii) investigating the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 17729/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Department appointed inspectors to the Northern Ireland Events Company Limited on 17 November 2008 under Article 452(2) and Article 425(2)(a) of the Companies (NI) Order 1986.

The target date for completion of the investigation and the production of a final draft report is 30 June 2013. The costs incurred by DETI in the inspection to date are £884,416.

World Police and Fire Games 2013

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the projected economic benefit to Northern Ireland from the World Police and Fire Games 2013.

(AQW 17737/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The 2013 Games will make a significant contribution towards attracting visitors to Belfast and Northern Ireland, and increasing their length of stay and expenditure. Events of this scale are an important element of tourism and the cumulative economic impact of major events in Belfast contributes significantly to the local economy both directly and indirectly. It is the aim of the Games to maximise the potential economic benefits of the Games in Belfast and the wider region.

The objectives, performance measures and associated target outcomes for the Games are set-out in the '2013 World Police and Fire Games Ltd Strategic and Business Plan 2012-2014'. The Strategic and Business Plan includes the performance target of achieving at least £15.5million in economic benefit to the local economy.

The foreword to the strategic and business plan from Deputy Chief Constable Judith Gillespie, 2013 WPFPG Chairperson, includes:

'I have every confidence that we will meet those expectations by delivering a first class Games that leave competitors with very happy memories of their time here, and leave Northern Ireland with a very positive and lasting legacy.'

The strategic and business plan is available to download using the following URL:

http://www.2013wpfg.com/media/12191/strategic_and_business_plan_2012-2014.pdf

Fuel Prices: Forecast

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department bases its forecast of the future wholesale price of fuel entirely on the futures market.

(AQW 17776/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has no direct role in setting or forecasting fuel prices.

Quinn Group: Relocation

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether her Department was consulted about the relocation of the head office of (a) the Quinn Group from Derrylin to Dublin; and (b) Quinn Plastics to Belgium; and (ii) whether any agreements on job-protection measures remain in place with the current ownership.

(AQW 17818/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Quinn Manufacturing Group has not re-located Head Office from Gortmullan. The Dublin office offers a useful meeting location but has no permanent staff.

Quinn Plastics is located across 7 sites within Europe. The Ballyconnell packaging plant employs 133, an increase from the 103 in April 2011. In Derrylin, Quinn Plastics employs 16 people and this will reduce to 12 as a consequence of the planned European reduction from 560 to 534.

There are no job protection agreements in place with Quinn Manufacturing Group.

Quinn Group: Job Losses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many people have lost their jobs or have been redeployed from Fermanagh to other locations since the Quinn family lost control of the Quinn Group.

(AQW 17819/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In April 2011, following the change of control, local Derrylin/Ballyconnell employment was 1,161. In October 2012 the corresponding total is 1,170.

The corresponding full Manufacturing Group figures are 2,750 and 2,813.

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises: Loan Fund

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to provide an update on the £50 million Loan Fund for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises.

(AQW 17835/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £50million Growth Loan Fund was launched in June 2012 and to date has received more than 150 enquiries, demonstrating a very strong demand for loans amongst SMEs.

At this stage 15 loan applications have been approved by WhiteRock Capital Partners which is managing the Fund on Invest NI's behalf.

Two loans have been drawn down to a total value of £625,000.

Bangor to Holywood Coastal Path: Lighting

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of whether installing lighting on the Holywood coastal path would attract visitors into Holywood for the night time economy.

(AQW 17837/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I would refer the member to the reply I gave to AQW 17611/11-15.

North Down Borough Council is leading on a Master Plan for Holywood Town Centre. Lighting on the Holywood coastal path is not part of this plan.

Mobile Coverage and Broadband: Ballykelly

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment given the poor mobile coverage and broadband accessibility which has existed in the Ballykelly area in recent years, whether she will raise the issue with providers to determine the improvement in reception that can be delivered for users in that area.

(AQW 17842/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I am continuing to meet with various telecoms providers on a regular basis and take every opportunity to express the need that all of Northern Ireland needs access to reliable, cost effective broadband services and mobile coverage and that includes the Ballykelly area.

In the past year I have met with fixed line broadband providers including BT and Eircom both of which have delivered multi-million pound government contracts in Northern Ireland. I have also met with satellite broadband providers including Onwave and on a number of occasions with the Mobile Network Operators (MNOs).

In addition my officials have been meeting with a number of broadband and mobile service providers in connection with current and future projects aimed at extending the reach and quality of services across Northern Ireland. This includes the £51million Next Generation Broadband Project which has led to superfast broadband services being available to 95% of premises across Northern Ireland, the forthcoming Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project (NIBIP) through which my Department is seeking to secure broadband services of at least 2Mbps to all premises and 24Mbps to 90% of premises by 2015, as well as a proposed project aimed at improving 3G mobile access and preparing the platform for the widespread deployment of 4G mobile services.

With regard to NIBIP and following a consultation process my Department is seeking to finalise the area of intervention. I can advise that the Ballykelly postcode district has been included in the intervention area for this project.

Borehole: Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether Tamboran Resources has informed her Department of (i) when it intends to begin the drilling of a borehole; and (ii) the proposed location of this borehole.

(AQW 17878/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Tamboran Resources wrote to my Department on 17th May 2012 requesting a technical variation to their work programme. This proposal related to the drilling of a single deeper cored borehole rather than the drilling of several shallow cored boreholes. Officials in my Department assessed this application on a technical basis and granted this modification to the work programme on 28th May 2012.

- (i) Under the terms of their Licence, Tamboran must carry out the drilling of a borehole in Years 1 to 3. It is my understanding that the company fully intends to meet this obligation, subject to the appropriate permissions and planning consents being in place.
- (ii) The company has not yet submitted an application for consent to drill to my Department nor has it given any further information on a proposed drilling location.

Borehole: Habitats Regulations Assessment

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether her Department intends to carry out a Habitats Regulations Assessment screening on the proposal by Tamboran Resources to drill a borehole well over 1000 metres deep, to determine whether it will result in significant negative impact on any of the Natura 2000 areas and whether this will be made available to the public following its completion.

(AQW 17946/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Yes.

Petroleum Licence Holders

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for an update on the work programmes of the four petroleum licence holders.

(AQW 17948/11-15)

Mrs Foster: All four petroleum licences are in Year Two of their five year Initial Term. The work programmes on the petroleum licences are still in the pre-drilling phase of exploration which comprises analysis of recently acquired and pre-existing geophysical and geological data.

None of the Licensees have submitted drilling applications to my Department.

Northern Ireland Electricity: Spare Transmission Capacity

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the process whereby Northern Ireland Electricity Ltd allocates spare transmission capacity to providers of renewable energy.

(AQW 17968/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to my response to AQW 17400/11-15.

Northern Ireland Electricity: Spare Transmission Capacity

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail any discussions she has had with Northern Ireland Electricity Ltd about a more open, equitable and transparent system to allocate spare transmission capacity.

(AQW 17969/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I refer to my response to AQW 17402/11-15.

Borehole: Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) whether her Department has granted Tamboran Resources permission to drill a borehole well over 1000 metres deep to penetrate the full Bundoran section; and (ii) if so, to provide details on when this decision was taken; and (iii) if not, when she expects to make this decision.

(AQW 18021/11-15)

Mrs Foster: My Department has agreed to a technical variation to the work programme whereby the company has stated their intention to drill a single deeper borehole rather than several shallow boreholes. This agreement does not represent permission to drill.

My Department has not received an application from Tamboran Resources to drill such a borehole and should an application be received it will be subject to the various assessments prior to permission being granted.

Invest NI: Jobs Figures

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17392/11-15, why Invest NI only reports on the Full-Time Equivalents when communicating the number of jobs promoted.

(AQW 18027/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Programme for Government targets are based on Full Time Equivalent jobs, therefore Invest NI corporate reporting is based on the same measure.

Shale Gas: Risk Assessment

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the adequacy of new controls designed to minimise the risk of seismic activity during the exploration for and exploitation of shale gas and their ramifications for the possible exploration for and exploitation of local reserves.

(AQW 18072/11-15)

Mrs Foster: New controls have been proposed by DECC for the monitoring and mitigation of the risks from induced seismicity associated specifically with the resumption of hydraulic fracturing operations by Cuadrilla Resources in Lancashire. Initially the application of these controls to Cuadrilla's exploration programme will be monitored by DECC's independent experts and

the lessons learnt will be used to inform the protocols to be applied to any subsequent fracking operations elsewhere in the UK. The feedback from this control system in Lancashire should provide very useful information that could be applied to the regulation of any future hydraulic fracturing operations that might take place in Northern Ireland.

Department of the Environment

Councils: Part-time Managers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AQW 15794/11-15, (i) why some councils are citing data protection issues for not disclosing the information whilst other councils do not consider data protection issues to be relevant; (ii) for his assessment of this disparity; (iii) whether he will investigate whether the councils have grounds for withholding the information; and (iv) why there is a lack of consistency across the councils.

(AQW 16468/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): A council's interpretation of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the decisions it takes based on its interpretation of that Act are in the first instance a matter for that council to determine, based on local circumstances. Where information is likely to lead to the identification of individuals, councils are not permitted to release information and, in some councils, the response would have related to a small number of individuals.

The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) regulates data protection in the public sector and it would be for the ICO to determine whether or not councils were applying the rules appropriately.

However, subject to the current clause, I shall be writing to Councils urging consistency of approach and why each Council acts as they do.

Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AWQ 14244/11-15, why it is necessary to have an immediate review of all current and recently approved minerals applications and a range of enforcement cases to ensure compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations.

(AQW 17534/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Given that the legal challenge to the recent permissions at Cavanacaw Gold Mine identified shortcomings in the determination process under the EIA Regulations I considered it prudent to check any recent approvals and current cases to ensure the requirements of the above regulations had been fully complied with.

This process is currently ongoing. If Government does not learn from previous errors, oversights or worse, there is a danger that the errors, oversights or worse will be repeated. Given the situation, over Cavanacaw, it was entirely right to look again at recent approvals and current cases.

Spatial Planning

Mr Allister asked the Minister of the Environment how the spatial planning policy has developed in the last year; and what further developments there will be.

(AQW 17564/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Both my Department and the Department for Regional Development are responsible for producing specific spatial planning policy guidance. In March of this year, DRD replaced the Regional Development Strategy 2025 with the Regional Development Strategy 2035, a spatial framework for the development of Northern Ireland which provides a spatial policy context for decisions by both central and local government.

My Department has the power to make a development plan for any area in the form of Area Plans, Local Plans or Subject Plans. The Department's development plan programme has been delayed due to litigation, however my Department continues to progress published draft plans to adoption, such as the Magherafelt Area Plan 2015 which was adopted on 14th December 2011 and work is also progressing on taking three other draft area plans to adoption. In 2015, it is intended that planning functions will transfer to the new Councils and this will enable Councils to prepare their own spatial development plans. In advance of this, work is now being taken forward to work with Council about development plan in cluster areas, so that the period up to 2015 is used productively to move towards plan-led development, which I believe is the most coherent and integrated approach to planning.

Special EU Programmes Body: Applications

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail each of the applications for funding his Department has submitted to the Special EU Programmes Body.

(AQW 17574/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department has been involved in three EU Programmes involving the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB), Interreg IIIA, Interreg IIIB and Interreg IVA.

Interreg IIIA, which is now closed, provided funding to 'address the economic and social disadvantage which can result from the existence of a border, by promoting the creation of programme networks involving, and also benefiting, local communities'. Under this programme the Department administered 18 applications. However, following assessment only 15 were awarded funding as 2 applications were rejected and 1 was subsumed into an accepted application. The Department provided part funding to these projects. The Department, as lead applicant, was involved in a Waste Awareness Media Campaign, with SEUPB being the Managing Authority and Joint Technical Secretariat.

Interreg IIIB, which is now closed, aimed to promote transnational solutions to problems associated with specific geographical areas and landscapes. Under this programme the Department was involved as co-partner in one project with Devon County Council in relation to providing a timely response to pollution incidents from shipping.

Details of the various projects for Interreg IIIA and the one for Interreg IIIB are contained at Annex A.

Interreg IVA, which is presently ongoing, provides funding to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. It supports strategic cross-border co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable region. Under this programme the SEUPB is both the designated Managing Authority and Implementing Body of the Programme. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency provided technical assistance to enable SEUPB's Joint Technical Secretariat to assess the applications and from the applications received under the measure eight projects were approved. Again the Department provided part funding to these projects.

A detailed list of the successful applications for Interreg IVA is contained in Annex B.

I have repeatedly raised how Government and DOE perform on accessing EU funds. There is a huge volume more we can do. Given that there is 'greening' of EU funds emerging as a major element in EU funding 2014-2020 – CAP, Horizon 2020 and funds respectively - the opportunities are clear. In the run down to 2014 and after, I have made much greater priority in DOE accessing EU funds and plan to increase resources so to do.

Annex A

INTERREG IIIA Projects

Dept Lead	Lead Applicant	Project Title	Description
DOE	Loughs Agency	Monitoring Buoys	The project proposed to purchase and install four additional telemetry systems in the Foyle and Carlingford catchments to gather information, 2 in Lough Foyle, 1 in a freshwater lough upstream and 1 to complement the system already installed in Carlingford Lough.
DOE	Loughs Agency	Patrol vessel	The project entailed the provision of an inshore patrol vessel to monitor, protect and conserve the fisheries and their environment in Carlingford Lough.
DOE	Loughs Agency	Tagging and Detection	The project proposed to purchase three coded wire tagging units (CWT) and four detection units for the marking of juvenile salmon as they are migrating from the river to their feeding grounds as smolts.
DOE	Fisheries Conservancy Board	Combined Fishery Programme	The project secured funding for the acquisition of equipment and the completion of works to support the SMP in the areas of protection, habitat rehabilitation/ enhancement and data collection in the cross-border Blackwater and Erne catchments.
DOE	DARD	Echo-sounders	This project centred on purchasing the latest generation fish counting echo-sounder equipment for fisheries research, and establish the use of this equipment in NI and RoI as a survey tool for monitoring fish stocks under the Water Framework Directive.
DOE	DARD	Shellfishery vessels	The project was made up of 4 distinct areas. Firstly a pilot project for VMS, the GIS / Roxswath Ground discrimination system, in depth site analysis and the RhiB (Rigid Hulled Inflatable Boat), has been in use in both cross border areas and covering seed mussel fishery.
DOE	DOE	Waste Awareness Media Campaign	The main aims were to reduce the volume of waste going to landfill, and increase recycling of waste materials. To achieve this, a campaign was developed which focused on a wide range of stakeholders, encouraging participation in waste reduction, recycling and recovery.

Dept Lead	Lead Applicant	Project Title	Description
DOE	Donegal County Council	NS SHARE	This was an initiative to promote joint action on the management of the aquatic environment. It aimed to strengthen the inter-regional capacity for environmental management, improve public awareness and participation in environmental issues and protect and enhance the environment.
DOE	Northern Region Fisheries Board	Lough Melvin	The project aimed to produce a catchment management plan for Lough Melvin and its catchment that will promote "good ecological status" and could form the basis of a Biodiversity Action Plan for Lough Melvin.
DOE	Ulster University	TRACE	This project was a water quality project operating in the Irish cross-border drumlin region and specifically within the Blackwater River catchment. The aim was to demonstrate a stepped improvement in water quality in three sub-catchments, approximately 5km ² in size, using total phosphorus (TP) as the main water quality indicator.
DOE	Queens University	Forest impacts	By providing a scientific assessment of response to catchment change, the project is a necessary precursor for the environmental management and monitoring of upland lakes.
DOE	ICBAN	Waste Management Strategies	The project undertook research to assist addressing the current lack of cross border waste management strategic planning.
DOE	NW Institute of Further and Higher Education	Producer Waste Awareness	The project aimed to address the gap between rapidly developing waste policy and the praxis of waste management in SME's and public sector organisations in the border regions.
DOE	Loughs Agency	Strule	This project provided a fish counting station of the River Strule at Omagh to provide facilities to count the number of wild Atlantic salmon returning annually to the Drumragh and Camowen tributaries of the Foyle catchment
DOE	Marine and Coastguard Agency	Seabed Mapping	The project promoted joint action to survey the seabed between Malin Head in the west, to Fair Head in the east of the island.

INTERREG IIIB

DOE was involved as a partner in the following project:

Lead Applicant	Project Title	Description
Devon County Council	EROCIPS - Emergency Response to Coastal Oil, Chemical and Inert Pollution from Shipping Project	The Emergency Response to Coastal Oil, Chemical and Inert Pollution from Shipping Project (EROCIPS) consisted of a series of work packages designed to provide responders with the necessary information to ensure a targeted counter pollution response. The intention was to provide a procedure that can be applied elsewhere in the coastal regions of Europe.

Annex B**INTERREG IVA Projects**

Lead Applicant	Project Title	Description
Agri Food and Biosciences Institute	Agricultural Need for Sustainable Willow Effluent Recycling	To provide robust scientific data on the sustainability of Short Rotation Coppice Willow for biofiltration/bioremediation technologies.
Agri Food and Biosciences Institute	Development of targeted ecological modelling tools for lake management	To define the main ecological relationships in large and small lakes in order to support the production of a targeted programme of measures.

Lead Applicant	Project Title	Description
Queens University Belfast	Controlling Priority Invasive Non-Native Riparian Plants And Restoring Native Biodiversity	To control and if possible eradicate invasive alien plants in demonstration river catchments in Ireland and Western Scotland.
Geological survey of Northern Ireland	Geo-environmental survey of the North of Ireland	To conduct geo-science surveys of the contiguous border counties of ROI, transfer the Tellus experience and expertise to organisations in the Republic, and undertake innovative environmental research.
Donegal County Council	Practical application of freshwater pearl mussel measures	To support the restoration of the freshwater pearl mussel to favourable conservation status at designated sites in the eligible area.
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland Hydrographic Survey project (INIS HYDRO)	To develop a standardised seabed survey specification to be used to acquire accurate and high-resolution seabed mapping data.
RSPN(NI)	Halting biodiversity loss	To boost the population and range of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species across the eligible area.
Loughs Agency	Integrated Aquatic Resources Management across Ireland, NI and Scotland(IRIS)	To develop an integrated and improved approach to resource management; covering unique freshwater and marine natural assets.

Cycling: By-laws

Mr Lyttle asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on proposed changes in the No Cycling By-laws that were requested by North Down Borough Council; and whether his Department remains willing to facilitate the changes that have been requested to date.

(AQW 17593/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The bye-laws that currently regulate cycling in the district of North Down Borough Council are the Pleasure Ground Bye-laws, which were confirmed in 1995. The 1995 bye-laws regulate cycling in designated areas.

On 17 March 2010, the Department received an application from the Council to revoke the 1995 bye-laws and replace them with a new set of Bye-laws for Pleasure Grounds, Public Walks and Open Spaces.

The Council proposes to make changes to its current provisions for cycling. It also proposes changes in a range of other matters such as camping, parking, sports and games, boats, water, and power-driven model aircraft. In addition, the Council also proposes changes to the areas to which the bye-laws are to apply.

Officials have worked with the Council to agree bye-laws that are:-

- consistent and not in conflict with general law;
- clear and certain, so that members of the public will be able to understand what is covered by the bye-laws and their responsibility to comply with the bye-laws;
- reasonable and not unduly restrictive;
- *intra vires*; and
- enforceable.

Most recently, on 17 October 2012, the Council supplied an updated version of the proposed bye-laws. The Department responded to the Council on 13 November 2012 asking the council:

- to clarify its intentions regarding promenades and to reconsider the relevant enabling legislation; and
- to consider the relationship/conflict between its proposed bye-law to protect wildlife, and the provisions of the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1986.

Officials also supplied specific advice in response to a question from the Council, and reminded the Council of previous advice that had not been fully addressed.

Officials are currently awaiting a response from the Council.

The Department remains committed to assisting the Council in obtaining bye-laws agreeable to all parties involved, and suitable for confirmation.

I have instructed DOE officials to meet Council officials in early January to resolve this matter and report back to me by the end of January 2013.

Marine Division: Staffing

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the projected number of staff required for the new Marine Division in his Department; and how many of these will be additional new staff.

(AQW 17596/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The projected staff complement of the new Division is 65 staff members spread over two main sites in Lisburn and at Millennium House, Belfast. The Marine Division's complement of staff has been resourced from relocating existing staff resources from within the Department. At this stage there are no new additional staff being appointed.

Marine Division: Budget

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what is the total budget of the proposed new Marine Division in his Department.

(AQW 17600/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Marine Division was established in November 2012 in order to draw together existing policy, planning and scientific functions for marine environmental protection and management from across the Department. It has also been tasked with implementing EU, international and national legislation along with delivering national legislation to promote, protect and sustain Northern Ireland's coastal waters.

Funding of £1.1million, previously allocated across a number of separate areas within the Department responsible for Marine functions, has been reallocated to the new Marine Division to cover the administration and programme expenditure for the period November 2012 to March 2013.

The budget for the financial year 2013–14 and thereafter is currently under active consideration.

The creation of the Marine Division has been widely welcomed, with some comments that it is the most significant government marine intervention for a long time. It creates a coherence around marine work that should be the best protection and best development going forward.

Environmental Enforcement

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment, pursuant to AWQ 14244/11-15, how many applications will be immediately reviewed for each of the current, recently approved minerals applications and enforcement cases; and how many waste cases will be reviewed.

(AQW 17634/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 120 current and recently approved applications are the subject of review to confirm compliance with the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations.

Waste and enforcement cases do not form part of the current review.

Snares: Consultation

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment when he will launch the consultation on the use of snares.

(AQW 17709/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Preparation of the proposals to further regulate the use of snares in Northern Ireland has been delayed due to other priorities, however, work to finalise a consultation paper is on-going and the Department is committed to issuing this by February 2013.

Royal Town Planning Institute

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many of the professional planners employed by his Department are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

(AQW 17720/11-15)

Mr Attwood: 212 planners employed by the Department are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute, which equates to 60%. A further 6 planners are members of the Irish Planning Institute.

Flood Prevention

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how much funding his Department will invest in flood prevention measures over the next three years.

(AQW 17736/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department does not provide funding directly for such measures as responsibility for flood prevention rests with other bodies.

However, when flooding does occur, the Department will provide support via the Scheme of Emergency Financial Assistance. Where appropriate the Scheme currently provides £1,000 assistance to householders who have suffered severe inconvenience as a result of heavy rainfall. The Scheme also allows councils to be reimbursed for the cost of offering a range of practical help and guidance, which includes collection, retention and disposal of damaged household contents and assistance with arrangements to clean up homes and gardens.

The Department also provides funding to local councils for Emergency Planning measures. This grant provides councils with funding to allow them to engage in emergency planning arrangements and to assist other organisations in leading local recovery.

In addition, the Department is working with other stakeholders to examine a range of approaches to develop more integrated and sustainable, catchment-based stormwater management systems in Northern Ireland, with the objective to ensure systems become more sustainable, moving away from traditional underground piped drainage, to solutions which replicate natural drainage processes.

Local Government Reform: DHSSPS Discussions

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of the Environment what discussions he has had with the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety on the reform of local government.

(AQW 17739/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As a member of the Executive, the Minister has expressed his views on a number of papers I have tabled dealing with local government reform issues.

DOE officials are working with DHSSPS colleagues to learn from that department's experience of health sector reform under the Review of Public Administration and to explore DHSSPS' future role in the community planning process.

Growth and Infrastructure Bill: Impact on Northern Ireland

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the impact of the Westminster Government's Growth and Infrastructure Bill on Northern Ireland, in particular clause 7; and which parts of the Bill will apply to Northern Ireland when it becomes an Act.

(AQW 17748/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Bill aims to promote economic growth and competitiveness, and facilitate provision of infrastructure by providing a comprehensive series of practical reforms to reduce confusing and overlapping red tape.

Clause 7 of the Bill (Electronic communications code: the need to promote growth) amends section 109 of the UK-wide Communications Act 2003 which gives the Secretary of State responsible for electronic communications powers to make Regulations on the application of the Electronic Communications Code. The Code governs the rights of electronic communications operators to install/maintain infrastructure on public and private land, subject to such restrictions and conditions set out in the Regulations. Clause 7 also disapplies the provisions of Article 4(1) of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands (NI) order 1985, which places a duty on public bodies in exercising their functions to have regard to the need to conserve the natural beauty and amenity of the countryside. This is the only provision that applies to Northern Ireland.

By amending the Communications Act which will require the Secretary of State to have regard to the need to promote economic growth when making Regulations referred to above, some relaxations will result allowing the installation of electronic communication infrastructure more rapidly.

However, it is not considered that this will have any significant negative impacts upon the countryside. This is because such considerations will take account of the existing requirements of section 109 of the Communication Act. This section includes the need to consider protection of the countryside before making regulations under that section.

In addition, specific approvals to place any such infrastructure on Areas of Special Scientific Interest or European sites will still be required and will be subject to any restrictions imposed by the designations on protected features.

Rubble: Crushing and Recycling

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of the Environment what assessment has been made of the net benefits of public provision of rubble crushing and recycling facilities.

(AQW 17764/11-15)

Mr Attwood: District Councils submit information to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the public provision of rubble collected for recycling through Waste Data Flow and the most recent information for this is at Annex A. I have asked for a submission on the pressure of public crushing facilities, though I would approach the idea with caution.

In total 20,755 tonnes of rubble were collected for recycling by 16 councils at 30 civic amenity sites in 2011/12, all of which brings an overall benefit by preventing the need to use this quantity of virgin material.

Annex A

District Councils that collected rubble for recycling during 2011-12	Waste Management Group	Number of Civic Amenity sites that collected rubble for recycling during 2011-12	Tonnage of rubble collected at these sites for recycling during 2011-12
Antrim Borough Council	arc21	3	2,728
Armagh City & District Council	SWaMP2008	1	1,335
Ballymena Borough Council	arc21	1	1,029
Ballymoney Borough Council	NWRWMG	1	468
Banbridge District Council	SWaMP2008	3	1,196
Carrickfergus Borough Council	arc21	1	3,282
Castlereagh Borough Council	arc21	1	789
Coleraine Borough Council	NWRWMG	1	625
Cookstown District Council	SWaMP2008	2	434
Derry City Council	NWRWMG	4	1,441
Larne Borough Council	arc21	3	1,075
Limavady Borough Council	NWRWMG	1	197
Lisburn City Council	arc21	2	1,649
Magherafelt District Council	NWRWMG	4	933
North Down Borough Council	arc21	1	2,713
Omagh District Council	SWaMP2008	1	861
Northern Ireland Totals	-	30	20,755

Planning Applications: New Homes

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment how many planning applications were made for new homes in the last three years.

(AQW 17778/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In the period April 2009 to June 2012 DOE Planning has received 14,801 applications for new single and replacement dwellings and 2,548 applications for housing developments, a total of 17,349 planning applications for residential properties.

The table below provides detail on the breakdown of the number of planning applications received for new single and replacement dwellings. These statistics are taken from the Annual and Quarterly Development Management statistical reports which are available to view on the DoE Planning website.

Table 1 Applications received for residential developments in both urban and rural areas

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	Q1 of 2012	Total
Urban new single dwelling	435	378	291	67	1171
Urban replacement dwelling	114	96	65	18	293
Rural new single dwelling	4043	2716	2404	531	9694
Rural replacement dwelling	1652	1067	741	183	3643
Total	6244	4257	3501	799	14801

Planning Permission: Quinn Cement

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment whether the camera system on the top of the pre-heater at Quinn Cement requires planning permission.

(AQW 17805/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I can confirm that following a recent site inspection, no breach of planning control was identified on top of the pre-heater tower.

Listed Buildings: Financial Assistance

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what financial assistance his Department has provided for listed buildings and structures in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17825/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In each of the last three financial years, the Department has provided the following funding, through its listed buildings grant-aid scheme:

- 2009-10 £3.514 million
- 2010-11 £3.773 million
- 2011-12 £4.677 million

Full details of the listed building grant-aid scheme may be found at http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/funding/historic_buildings_grants-2.htm

In addition to these amounts, a grant totalling £0.958 million was paid to the Northern Ireland Science Park for approved works to the Thompson Dry Dock. This grant forms part of a management agreement for the site.

Emissions Gap Report

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of the Environment, in light of the Emissions Gap Report, whether he has any new plans to tackle rising greenhouse gas emission levels.

(AQW 17849/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Emissions Gap Report underlines both the feasibility of emission reductions and the importance of international cooperation to raise the current inadequate level of ambition. The Report shows that despite some progress the world still needs to go further and faster in cutting emissions. It has become clear that greater efforts are needed to be made to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Taking action now isn't only right for our climate, but it will be cheaper in the long run than having to catch up by doing more after 2020.

Climate change represents one of the most serious threats facing the world today. This global issue demands a global response – and all countries need to be part of the solution. Northern Ireland as a developed nation has an ethical obligation to play its part in reducing global emissions.

The Northern Ireland Executive is committed through its Programme for Government (PfG) to continue to work towards a reduction in greenhouse (GHG) emissions by at least 35% on 1990 levels by 2025. To support the delivery of this target, I chair the Cross Departmental Working Group on Climate Change. The group developed a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Action Plan, which was published in February 2011, setting out the policies and measures which each department will undertake to help meet the Executive's emissions reduction target. The plan also contains a commitment to report to the Executive annually on performance. The first progress report was submitted to the Executive in June 2012.

Following the most recent meeting of the CDWGCC in November 2012, it was agreed that a cross departmental workshop be arranged for early 2013 to review progress across all departments against the current GHG emissions reduction action plan and to consider what other measures departments may be able to bring forward to help achieve further emission reductions.

It is also my intention to go to public consultation on policy proposals for a NI Climate Change Bill early in 2013. The results of this consultation will inform the legislation best designed to meet the needs of the people of Northern Ireland and underpin efforts to present Northern Ireland as a world leader in carbon reduction - to be what we and others see as a genuinely clean and green land.

Moreover, I recently held a meeting with Executive Ministers to interrogate how, individually and collectively, we can make fresh progress with the ambition of being a world leader in carbon reduction. This is the scale of the challenge and should be the scale of our ambition.

Planning: Article 31 Applications

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of the Environment for an update on the processing of Article 31 major planning applications.

(AQO 3101/11-15)

Mr Attwood: As of 11/12/12, 16 Article 31 applications have been processed to date this year. There are currently 34 live Article 31 applications. This compares with 60 live Article 31 applications when I took up my Ministerial position in May 2011 and a total of 29 applications have been processed since then. However, before Christmas, I expect to make known new decisions in, up to, 7 more cases.

I have impressed on my planning officials the need to process planning applications, particularly those of major importance, in a

timely manner. The Article 31's are managed in an active manner, to demonstrate that the planning system is 'turning corners'.

Historic Monuments: Delisting Criteria

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the criteria for the delisting of historic monuments. (AQO 3096/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Special statutory protection of historic monuments is usually provided through the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (NI) Order 1995. The two types of statutory protection afforded by this Order are:

- The protection of an historic monument or archaeological site as a monument in the ownership, care or guardianship of the Department of the Environment, i.e. State Care
- The inclusion of an historic monument on a schedule, i.e. a scheduled monument

There are no set criteria for the removal of statutory protection from Scheduled Monuments or State Care Monuments and any proposal to remove such protection would need to be considered on a case by case basis.

Any proposal to schedule or de-schedule an historic monument must be brought before the Historic Monuments Council, a Statutory Advisory Council formed under the provisions of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Order.

Listed Buildings

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number of listed buildings in each constituency. (AQW 17886/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The department does not hold information on listed buildings on a constituency basis, and it would require a major administrative exercise in order to collate this data. Information is collected and recorded by district council area, and I have attached a breakdown of the number of listed buildings in each council area.

Additional information about Listed Buildings is available at:

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/other-index/content-databases/content-databases-build.htm>.

Council ID	Council Name	No of Listed Buildings
1	Derry	476
2	Limavady	140
3	Coleraine	328
4	Ballymoney	86
5	Moyle	332
6	Larne	186
7	Ballymena	258
8	Magherafelt	193
9	Cookstown	219
10	Strabane	165
11	Omagh	161
12	Fermanagh	513
13	Dungannon and South Tyrone	503
14	Craigavon	208
15	Armagh	529
16	Newry and Mourne	701
17	Banbridge	334
18	Down	718
19	Lisburn	336
20	Antrim	251
21	Newtownabbey	62
22	Carrickfergus	84

Council ID	Council Name	No of Listed Buildings
23	North Down	281
24	Ards	379
25	Castlereagh	26
26	Belfast	1079

Listed Buildings: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the number and locations of the buildings in North Down that were awarded listed status in each of the last five years; and how many buildings in North Down are being considered for listed status. (AQW 17888/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The table below indicates the number of buildings in North Down that have been listed in each of the last five years. The location of those listed is detailed in attachment one.

Year	No listed
2007/2008	2
2008/2009	0
2009/2010	0
2010/2011	0
2011/2012	0

Since 2010, 555 structures in the North Down Council Area have been visited and recorded as part of the Department's Second Survey of Buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest. All buildings already protected by listing are being reviewed as part of this work. Most of these records have been considered in this current financial year, and to date (December 2012) 23 buildings have been added to the list. Details of these new listings are provided in attachment two. 68 records remain to be processed. Some of these may also result in new listings.

Attachment One			
Second Survey Database			
North Down Council - Listed during 2007/2008			
HB Ref No	Address	Survey 1	Current Use
HB23/18/058	Glenmakieran, 141 Bangor Road	Not_Listed	House
HB23/18/059	Cultra Station House, Cultra	Not_Listed	House
12 December 2012	Page 1 of 1		

Attachment Two				
NI Buildings Database				
New Listings in North Down since 01/04/2012				
HB Ref No	Address	Survey1	Survey 2	Current Use
HB23/01/028	Broom Cottage, High Bangor Road, Donaghadee, Co Down, BT19 6NA		B1	House
HB23/01/029	26 Andrew's Shorefield, Balloo Lower, Groomsport, Bangor, Co Down, BT19 6LJ		B2	House
HB23/03/008	Glen Cottage, 43 Bangor Road, Groomsport, Co Down, BT19 6JF		B2	House
HB23/03/016 A	5 Waverley Drive, Bangor, Co Down, BT20 5LD		B2	House
HB23/03/016 B	7 Waverley Drive, Bangor, Co Down, BT20 5LD		B2	House
HB23/04/002	Bridge, Gransha Road, Bangor, Co Down BT19		B2	Bridge

Attachment Two				
NI Buildings Database				
New Listings in North Down since 01/04/2012				
HB Ref No	Address	Survey1	Survey 2	Current Use
HB23/05/003	Wesley Centenary Methodist Church, Hamilton Road, Bangor, Co Down BT20 4JP		B2	Church
HB23/05/006	Bangor Carnegie Library, Hamilton Road Bangor, Co Down, BT20 4LH		B2	Library
HB23/06/013	15 Drumhirk Avenue, Drumhirk, Conlig Newtownards, Co Down BT23 7QB		B1	House
12 December 2012	Page 1 of 3			

New Listings in North Down since 01/04/2012				
HB Ref No	Address	Survey1	Survey 2	Current Use
HB23/07/007 B	Dufferin Memorial Hall, 2A Hamilton Road Bangor, Co Down BT20 4LE		B2	Hall
HB23/07/008	Masonic Hall, Hamilton Road, Bangor, Co Down		B1	Hall
HB23/10/002 C	Dovecote, Clondeboye Courtyard, Bangor Co Down BT19 1RN		B1	Estate Related Structures
HB23/10/002 I	Bridge, Clondeboye Estate, Clondeboye Bangor, Co Down BT19 1RN		B2	Bridge
HB23/12/002	52 Springhill Road, Bangor, Co Down BT20 3NP		B2	House
HB23/14/013	32 Maxwell Road, Bangor, Co Down BT20 3SG		B1	House
HB23/14/015 A	14 Raglan Road, Bangor, Co Down BT20 3TL		B2	House
HB23/14/015 B	16 Raglan Road, Bangor, Co Down BT20 3TL		B2	House
HB23/15/023	Red Bridge, Ballyrobert Road, Crawfordsburn, Bangor, Co Down BT19		A	Bridge
HB23/15/030	Railway Bridge, Crawfordsburn Country Park, Crawfordsburn, Bangor, Co Down		B+	Bridge
12 December 2012	Page 2 of 3			

New Listings in North Down since 01/04/2012				
HB Ref No	Address	Survey1	Survey 2	Current Use
HB23/15/039 F	Road Bridge, Bridge Road, Helen's Bay Bangor, Co Down		A	Bridge
HB23/16/008 A	The Grey House, 60 Station Road Craigavad, Holywood, Co Down BT18 0BP		B1	House
HB23/18/032	Thornleigh, 106 Bangor Road, Holywood, Co Down BT18 0LR		B2	House
HB23/20/082	McCammon Memorial Masonic Hall, 11 Sullivan Place, Holywood, Co Down BT18 9JF		B2	Hall
12 December 2012	Page 3 of 3			

Buildings: Delisted

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many buildings have been delisted in each of the last five years.
(AQW 17889/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The information you have sought is provided in the following table:-

Year	No delisted
2007/2008	7
2008/2009	11
2009/2010	3
2010/2011	31
2011/2012	14

Houses in Multiple Occupation: Prosecutions, East Belfast

Mr Newton asked the Minister of the Environment to outline the number of prosecutions his Department has secured in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation deemed to be operating without meeting the necessary legal requirements within the East Belfast constituency.

(AQO 3097/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There have been no prosecutions under planning legislation in relation to unauthorised Houses of Multiple Occupation in East Belfast. I have requested an update on this issue.

I have made a point of saying that the flipside of good planning is good enforcement. Through the service of urgent works notices, heritage crime summits, the first service ever of a completion notice, enhancing resource of the Environmental Crime Unit, bringing forward the Planning Bill with new enforcement powers and assessing where to serve injunctions, all indicate my approach.

However there are issues around the HMO approach as this question indicates.

Winter Driving: Safety Measures

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of the Environment what additional road safety measures his Department is putting in place to highlight the dangers of winter driving.

(AQO 3099/11-15)

Mr Attwood: My Department is currently involved in several road safety initiatives appropriate for this time of year.

A main focus of activities over the Christmas and New Year period is the reinforcement of the anti drink drive message. The Department is currently supporting the PSNI's winter drink drive operation to discourage and detect drink drivers.

The Department is also supporting Coca-Cola's Designated Driver initiative. The scheme, which will be operational in many venues across Northern Ireland, encourages consumers to plan their nights out with a friend who abstains from alcohol for the evening to ensure they get home safely.

A further relevant activity is the Department's anti drink drive campaign, 'Hit Home'. The advert emphasises the impairing effects of alcohol on driving – even from the first drink. The message is designed to increase further the unacceptability of driving after one or two drinks. The campaign features ordinary people who warn: 'Every drink increases your risk of crashing'. As with all DOE anti drink drive messages, this is underpinned with the strapline "Never Ever Drink And Drive".

Other advertising activity includes highlighting the dangers of drug driving and airing the real-life messages captured in the 'Crashed Lives' accounts, which are particularly poignant at this time of year.

The DOE 'Gift' radio campaign will air and is being supported by the PSNI with outdoor advertising on bus shelters. The campaign will run throughout December targeting all road users with a mix of key road safety messages that particularly focus on the Christmas period.

The Department will continue to advise all road users to adapt their behaviour according to the conditions. DOE will continue to support the road safety partners in their advice to road users. DRD have issued leaflets to households with advice on how to deal with wintry conditions. PSNI have also developed a leaflet containing advice on how motorists should deal with driving in snow, ice or fog this winter.

Detailed advice is also available on NI Direct <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/news-nov12-driving-in-wintery-weather-conditions>

Planning: Solar Panel Developments

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of the Environment for his assessment of the planning guidance for large scale solar panel developments.

(AQO 3100/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Large scale solar panel developments are assessed against policy and guidance contained in PPS18.

PPS18 aims to facilitate the siting of renewable energy generating facilities in appropriate locations within the built and natural environment. Best Practice Guidance (BPG) associated with PPS18 provides background information and guidance on both active and thermal solar technology.

My assessment is that PPS18 and the BPG adequately reflect my position in promoting the greater use of solar technology in new developments and the retrofitting or incorporation of such technology on existing buildings where appropriate.

The policy and guidance ensures that while the wider environmental, economic and social benefits of large scale solar panel developments will be given significant weight in determining whether planning permission should be granted, the environmental, landscape, visual and amenity impacts associated with the development are also issues that have to be assessed.

I have had some discussions recently on the potential of 'solar farms'. This again demonstrates the view that, arguably, renewables is Ireland's biggest economic opportunity.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of the Environment when the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will be adopted.

(AQO 3102/11-15)

Mr Attwood: It is my intention that the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will be adopted by the end of March 2013. As members know, I published BMAP 'pre-adoption' as I believe after such a long period of inquiry, it was necessary for people in the BMAP area have knowledge of BMAP recommendations.

Local Government: Transitional Committees

Mr Dickson asked the Minister of the Environment when he intends to transform Voluntary Transitional Committees into Statutory Transitional Committees.

(AQO 3103/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In order to drive the process of transition and convergence of local councils under the reform of local government, my Department is working to transform local Transition Committees from a voluntary standing to a statutory position as soon as possible. I intend to lay regulations in the Assembly by February 2013 and will put the Committees onto a statutory footing as soon as this legislation has been passed by the Assembly.

This will enable Statutory Transition Committees to take forward key areas of work that will include governance, corporate and financial planning, service delivery, transferring functions, community planning, capacity building and the appointment of senior staff. I believe this will help create certainty and provide leadership.

However, there is no impediment for VTC's pressing on with their work programmes, which should be accelerating as we are now 500 days to the shadow elections and 850 days to the new council clusters going live.

Local Government: Severance Costs

Mr Cree asked the Minister of the Environment whether his Department has carried out any analysis of the projected severance costs for senior council officials who will leave local government employment during the reform of Local Government.

(AQO 3104/11-15)

Mr Attwood: An economic appraisal carried out by Price Waterhouse Coopers included analysis of potential severance costs for senior council officials. The estimated figure is £17.8 million. Clearly, these figures are being updated to ensure precise up to date figures.

Planning: Retail Applications

Mr McNarry asked the Minister of the Environment what plans he has to amend planning policy to meet the interests of both out of town and town centre retail applications.

(AQO 3105/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I have commissioned a review of town centre and retail planning policy, which I intend to bring forward as part of the new Single Planning Policy Statement. It is intended that a draft Single Planning Policy Statement will issue for public consultation next year and be finalised as soon as practicable in 2014.

It is my view that there is a need to reconfigure planning policy to deal with the complex out of town and town centre retail development issues facing the north at this time. I will soon be engaging consultants to update the evidential context in

relation to town centres and retailing and to undertake engagement with stakeholders. This necessary research will inform the development of new retail and town centre policy.

The principle that I will work to is 'Town Centre First'. Clearly, in the meantime, I will decide current retail applications on the basis of existing policy, law and process and will do so in a precautionary way.

Local Government: Transferred Functions

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of the Environment to outline what measures will be implemented to ensure that functions transferred from central government to local councils in the reform of Local Government will continue to be properly funded. (AQO 3106/11-15)

Mr Attwood: One of the two finance-related guiding principles agreed by the Executive was that the functions, which are to transfer from central to local government, should be fit for purpose, sufficiently resourced and be rates neutral at the point of transfer. This will require the transfer of resources from central to local government when the functions transfer. I intend to hold to that principle.

The Executive and the transferring central government departments, including the Department of the Environment, are exploring the options available to provide the required future funding.

To support this work, I have established a Transfer of Functions Working Group and a Finance Working Group. These two are working with the Reform Funding Task and Finish Sub-Group to consider and develop arrangements for the future (i.e. post transfer) funding of the functions which are to transfer from central to local government to ensure that the second guiding principle is adhered to.

It would be hostile to the needs of rate payers and the success of local government if functions were transferred 'on the cheap'. I believe this is appreciated by all. Transferring departments will need to ensure transfer is on the principles unanimously endorsed by the executive.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Civil Service: Vacancies, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of vacancies in the Civil Service in the Derry City Council area, broken down by (i) grade; and (ii) Department. (AQW 15697/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The number of vacancies in permanent Northern Ireland Civil Service posts, located in the Derry City Council area, in each of the Northern Ireland Departments including their Agencies at 10 December 2012, is set out in the attached table.

NICS Vacancies (Full Time Equivalent (FTE) basis) in the Derry City Council area, Broken down by Grade and Government Department at 10 December 2012

	AA	AO	EO2	EO1	SO	DP	G7	Other		Total
								No.	Grade	
DARD		1.4	3	4	2					10.4
DE		1	1					2	Support Grade Band 2	4
DEL		2	2	1		1				6
DFP			3	3	2	2	2			12
DOE	1	1					1	1	Traffic Examiner	7
								2	Prof & Technical Officer	
								1	Senior Prof & Technical Officer	
DRD								1	PTO Graphic Designer	1
DSD		3	8					1	Personal Secretary	12
Totals	1	8.4	17	8	4	3	3	8		52.4

Departments not shown in the table had no vacancies.

EU Budget: Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the Executive's position on our national Government's requirement for a reduction in the EU budget.

(AQW 17434/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Negotiation of the EU Budget is a reserved matter.

The Executive has not formally discussed the UK Government position.

We are broadly in favour of a real reduction in UK contributions and I have conveyed this to UK Ministers.

I and other Ministers take every opportunity to advise UK Ministers that any settlement must protect the interests of Northern Ireland in relation to our EU receipts.

Solicitors and Barristers

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of (i) newly qualified solicitors and (ii) new members of the Bar in each of the last ten years, broken down by gender.

(AQW 17650/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Department of Finance and Personnel does not hold statistics on the number of newly qualified solicitors, or new members of the Bar.

This information can be obtained, in relation to solicitors, from the Law Society for Northern Ireland, and for barristers, from the General Council of the Bar.

Procurement: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps are being taken to ensure procurement contracts are available to small and medium sized enterprises.

(AQW 17667/11-15)

Mr Wilson: In my Statement to the Assembly on 8 October I reported that in 2010 – 2011 77% of all contracts were awarded to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). I can now report the same percentage for 2011-2012. These figures demonstrate the significant role SMEs play in delivering supplies, works and services to NI Departments, their agencies and NDPBs.

The Procurement Board, which I chair, is keen to see further progress in reducing bureaucracy and providing opportunities for SME access to government contracts. To this end it has published an extensive set of Procurement Guidance Notes which will help to:

- explain public procurement processes to SMEs and show how procurement opportunities can be accessed;
- reduce and remove barriers for smaller businesses wishing to compete for public sector opportunities, for example reductions in the levels of experience needed;
- increase the visibility of procurement opportunities by advertising contracts above £30,000 on a single procurement portal. For contracts below £30,000, tenders are invited from suppliers registered on the portal;
- streamline procedures for procurements below the EU thresholds and reduce the paperwork associated with tendering for these contracts;
- reduce liability and insurance requirements by making these proportionate to the risks associated with the project; and
- ensure that departments operate SME friendly procedures in their supply chains.

These measures are supported by a programme of 'Meet the Buyer' events undertaken by CPD and Centres of Procurement Expertise. This year CPD has provided practical advice on how to access public sector opportunities at a number of events attended by over 1,200 SME representatives. I would ask all Members to support these events and encourage SMEs in their constituencies to avail themselves of these opportunities.

Procurement: Social Clauses

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what steps are being taken to ensure the inclusion of social clauses in departmental procurement exercises.

(AQW 17668/11-15)

Mr Wilson: It is for departments to determine the extent to which they can incorporate social clauses into a procurement exercise. This is best done at the scoping and planning stage.

In line with the Programme for Government commitment, the Procurement Board Strategy requires departments to set targets for inclusion of these clauses in contracts. Departments will be required to report progress to the Procurement Board.

The Central Procurement Directorate and Centres of Procurement Expertise (CoPEs) will work with departments to help in the delivery of these clauses. To assist with this process the Procurement Board issued guidance in 2008 which was endorsed by the Executive. This guidance offers advice to departments and CoPEs on how to integrate equality and sustainability,

including social clauses, into the public procurement process. The Procurement Board is currently considering further supplementary guidance on integrating social considerations into government contracts.

Public Sector Senior Executives: Salary Guidelines

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what guidelines exist in regard to the salary levels, and any increase therein, which are afforded to senior executives in the public sector; and to what extent the guidelines embrace expectations or provisions on pay restraint.

(AQW 17675/11-15)

Mr Wilson: DFP issues annual guidelines on the pay remit and approval process. The latest guidance (relating to 2012-13) was issued on 13 August 2012 and can be accessed on my department's website. This outlines the Executive's pay policy, control parameters, approval process and roles and responsibilities in that regard.

This guidance makes it clear that the Executive's control of public sector pay is based on the principle that the public sector should offer a pay and reward package that allows it to recruit, retain and motivate suitable staff. The guidance also indicates that public sector pay should reflect the circumstances specific to the local labour market.

Unanswered Question

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel why he has not answered AQW 15697/11-15; and when it will be answered.

(AQW 17684/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The question has now been answered. As the information is not held centrally by my Department input was requested from other Departments. Unfortunately the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure did not respond within the required timescale.

Green New Deal: Funding

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much money was retained from the closure of Energy Efficiency Homes Scheme and the Low Carbon Homes Scheme for the Green New Deal; and when this funding will be utilised.

(AQW 17693/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The funding realised from the closure of Energy Efficiency Homes Scheme and the Low Carbon Homes Scheme was to provide funding towards the Green New Deal programme.

As determined by the business case, the option selected for the Green New Deal programme is the Northern Ireland Housing Executive Boiler Replacement Scheme, which is scheduled to run for the next three years.

This year £183,000 in administrative and revenue savings associated with the closure of the schemes will be transferred from DFP to DSD in the January monitoring round in line with the agreed policy position.

There are also savings to be generated in 2013-14 and 2014-15 and these will be finalised and transferred at that time.

Rates Arrears: Foyle

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many businesses in the Foyle constituency have rates arrears over £10,000.

(AQW 17694/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of businesses in the Foyle constituency that have rates arrears over £10,000 is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. As at 30th November 2012, rates of over £10,000 remain unpaid for 331 Non-Domestic properties in the Derry District Council Area.

Invest NI: Salary of Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how a reported increase of £30,000 per annum in the salary of the Chief Executive of Invest NI is compatible with the Executive's stance on pay restraint in the public sector.

(AQW 17710/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The guidance makes it clear that the Executive's control of public sector pay is based on the principle that the public sector should offer a pay and reward package that allows it to recruit, retain and motivate suitable staff.

Autumn Statement

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what effect the Chancellor's Autumn statement will have on the Northern Ireland economy.

(AQW 17718/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There were a number of specific decisions taken by the Chancellor which will have a significant impact on Northern Ireland. For example the additional 1% reduction in corporation tax from April 2014 and the two year increase in the annual investment allowance for small business from January 2013 will encourage investment.

Of particular importance is that Treasury have confirmed that they will support a derogation from the Carbon Price Floor for Northern Ireland, subject to discussions with the European Commission. I have been robustly making the case to the Chief Secretary that enforcement of the Carbon Price Floor upon Northern Ireland would have a massive detrimental impact on the local energy sector and I am therefore particularly pleased that Treasury have responded positively to our concerns.

In terms of public expenditure, the decision taken by the Chancellor to channel more funding into capital investment is welcome and for Northern Ireland this means additional capital investment resources of £131million over the next two years. The additional capital investment allocations were funded by cuts to Whitehall departments' resource budgets of 1% next year and 2% in 2014-15. However, because health and education were exempt from these cuts and some additional allocations were made in respect of business support measures, the impact on Northern Ireland was much less severe.

Our resource DEL will increase by £2.4 million next year, with a subsequent reduction of £34.3 million in 2014-15. This is manageable without the Executive having to re-open its Budget position. However, the Office of Budget Responsibility projections for the UK economy and public finances suggest that further public expenditure reductions will be necessary beyond 2014-15. So there can be no doubt that the Executive will face some very difficult decisions as part of its next Budget setting process.

Rates: Debt Collection

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much his Department has spent on legal fees in relation to rates debt collection over the last three years.

(AQW 17734/11-15)

Mr Wilson: If a ratepayer has not paid their rate bill, or made contact with LPS to agree a payment arrangement after the issue of a bill and a final demand, LPS has little option but to take forward Court proceedings to recover the money owing.

LPS is obliged to pay fees to the NI Courts & Tribunals Service for the different stages of the legal proceedings, including for issue of a Court Process, the granting of a Court Decree, the issue of a Notice of Intention to Enforce Debt, and Enforcement Fees. These charges are added to ratepayers' bills, and therefore become part of the recoverable amount.

Payments are made to the Courts & Tribunals Service by LPS at the time that the actions are taken and are then recovered from ratepayers in due course. Given the daily movements in individual rate accounts, and the time differences in payment to the Courts and recovery of the money, it is not possible to provide an accurate figure for the net (unrecovered) legal costs in any period. The figures in the table below are therefore the total (gross) figures paid by LPS to the Courts & Tribunals Service.

Year	Payment by LPS to Courts & Tribunals Service
2009/10	£2,506,706.42
2010/11	£2,654,959.75
2011/12	£3,216,079.30

In addition, LPS also incurs professional legal costs in relation to cases pursued through the High Court Chancery Division. The figures in the table below are therefore the total figures paid by LPS to Crown Solicitor's Office in relation to such cases.

Year	Payment by LPS to Crown Solicitor's Office
2009/10	£150,328.36
2010/11	£254,775.94
2011/12	£344,092.38

LPS also incurs additional staff costs in pursuing recovery of unpaid rates. These costs form part of the cost of rate collection and are therefore paid from the district and regional rates – in effect, by all ratepayers.

I would stress that no recovery costs would exist if all ratepayers paid their rates in a timely manner, or if in difficulty contacted LPS to agree a payment arrangement.

Working Parents: Minimum Wage

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many (i) full-time and (ii) part-time working parents are on the minimum wage.

(AQW 17777/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Official estimates for the number of people earning the minimum wage come from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). Figures from the ASHE at April 2012 show that there were an estimated 11,000 full-time and 20,000 part-time employees in Northern Ireland earning the national minimum wage.

Information on the number of employees who are working parents is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), as this information is not available from the ASHE.

For the period April – June 2012, the LFS estimated that there were 327,000 parents in employment. Of these, 234,000 (72%) were working full-time and 93,000 (28%) were working in a part-time capacity.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many shops in the Ballymena council area have taken advantage of the rates relief scheme.

(AQW 17791/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of shops that have benefited from any of the various types of non-domestic rates reliefs in the (i) Ballymena, (ii) Ballymoney and (iii) Moyle Council areas from 1st April 2010, when the Small Business Rate Relief was first introduced, to 30th November 2012 is given in the attached tables. A breakdown of the number of shops by the type of relief is also given.

Ballymena Borough Council

Relief Type	Number of shops
SBRR - 50%	23
SBRR - 25%	177
SBRR - 20%	144
Shop Window Display Relief	0
Empty Premises Relief	0
Total number of shops receiving one or more relief¹	340

Ballymoney Borough Council

Relief Type	Number of shops
SBRR - 50%	24
SBRR - 25%	70
SBRR - 20%	59
Shop Window Displays	0
Empty Premises Relief	0
Total number of shops receiving one or more relief¹	152

Moyle District Council

Relief Type	Number of shops
SBRR - 50%	40
SBRR - 25%	67
SBRR - 20%	28
Shop Window Displays	0
Empty Premises Relief	0
Total number of shops receiving one or more relief¹	134

1 Any individual shop may have received more than one type of relief over the course of the last three years.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many shops in the Ballymoney council area have taken advantage of the rates relief scheme.

(AQW 17792/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of shops that have benefited from any of the various types of non-domestic rates reliefs in the (i) Ballymena, (ii) Ballymoney and (iii) Moyle Council areas from 1st April 2010, when the Small Business Rate Relief was first introduced, to 30th November 2012 is given in the attached tables. A breakdown of the number of shops by the type of relief is also given.

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1 Any individual shop may have received more than one type of relief over the course of the last three years.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many shops in the Moyle council area have taken advantage of the rates relief scheme.

(AQW 17793/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The number of shops that have benefited from any of the various types of non-domestic rates reliefs in the (i) Ballymena, (ii) Ballymoney and (iii) Moyle Council areas from 1st April 2010, when the Small Business Rate Relief was first introduced, to 30th November 2012 is given in the attached tables. A breakdown of the number of shops by the type of relief is also given.

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Total number of shops receiving one or more relief¹	134

1 Any individual shop may have received more than one type of relief over the course of the last three years.

Stamp Duty: Net Fiscal Balance Reports

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail in full the calculation used to estimate the share of stamp duties in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, including references to the source data. (AQW 17871/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, the UK figure for stamp duty is taken from the PSAT2 databank published by ONS.

Northern Ireland stamp duty is estimated based on the region's share of UK revenue raised from: (1) land and property stamp duties and; (2) stocks and shares stamp duties.

Stamp duty land tax (SDLT) is published by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and is disaggregated by Government Office Region (GOR). Northern Ireland's share of UK households who own stocks, shares, unit trusts, PEPs and ISAs – as recorded in the Family Resources Survey produced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) – is used to estimate stamp duty from stocks and shares in Northern Ireland.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Rates Arrears: Limavady

Mr G Robinson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many people in the Limavady Borough Council area were in rates arrears in each of the last five years. (AQW 17976/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of people in the Limavady Borough Council area who were in rates arrears in each of the last five years is not available. Information is available on the number of properties in the Limavady Borough Council area that had rates outstanding at the end of each rating year since 31st March 2010.

The table below shows the number of properties (both domestic and non-domestic) in the Limavady Borough Council area with rate arrears at the end of each rating year since 2009/2010 (the earliest year for which comparable information is available).

Date	No of properties in Limavady Borough Council area with rate arrears at end of year		
	Domestic	Non-Domestic	All properties
31/03/2010	1,440	263	1,703

Date	No of properties in Limavady Borough Council area with rate arrears at end of year		
	Domestic	Non-Domestic	All properties
31/03/2011	1,401	221	1,622
31/03/2012	1,662	199	1,861

Net Fiscal Balance Reports

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to identify the ways in which the calculations used to estimate distinct revenue streams within the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 are different to those used within the Expenditure and Revenues for Scotland reports.

(AQW 17991/11-15)

Mr Wilson: At the outset, I would reiterate that the purpose of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 is to provide an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position. It is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue streams. As such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

In developing the report, DFP has sought to apply the approach used to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication as set out in its detailed revenue methodology paper, which is available on the Scottish Government website.

Where there are differences in the methodologies, these have typically been as a consequence of differences in the availability of information in each region, i.e. where actual data relating to a revenue stream has been available for Scotland but not for Northern Ireland or vice-versa.

For example, the Scottish methodology paper indicates that HMRC produces estimates of the amount of revenue raised from capital gains tax in Scotland. However, the Northern Ireland approach apportions the overall UK figure for capital gains tax according to its share of UK GVA (less extra-regio).

On the other hand, while Northern Ireland's vehicle excise duty is separately recorded and published by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing NI (DVLNI), Scotland's share of vehicle excise duty is estimated on the basis of Scotland's proportion of the UK's total value of licences.

Details of the methodology employed and the various sources of data used in estimating total public sector revenue in Northern Ireland are outlined in Annex B of the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 report.

Net Fiscal Balance Reports

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how the methodology used in the Net Fiscal Balance Reports were amended to reflect the revisions in the methodology which is employed by the Scottish Government; and what was the purpose and outcome of these revisions.

(AQW 17993/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The reference in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 with respect to amendments to the methodology stems from, and advises users of the fact that significant work had been undertaken in past years to develop and refine the overall fiscal balance estimate in line with the GERS approach and the data that was and is available locally. However, there have not been any recent methodological changes required in response to Scottish amendments as the approach to this has become established.

However, DFP continues to seek ways in which to refine the Northern Ireland approach and, as shown in table B.1 of the report, revisions were made to the methodology for calculating VAT and 'Other Taxes and Royalties'. Essentially, VAT refunds that were included in 'Other Taxes and Royalties' revenue stream in previous reports are now included in the VAT revenue figure. This presentational change has improved consistency with the GERS report, but has not affected the overall net fiscal balance estimate as the methodology for apportioning this amount remains the same.

Net Fiscal Balance Reports

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail in full the calculation used to estimate the share of capital gains tax in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, including references to the source data.

(AQW 17995/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, the UK figure for capital gains tax is taken from the PSAT2 databank published by ONS and is apportioned to Northern Ireland according to its share of UK GVA (less extra-regio). Please note that GVA 'less extra regio' excludes income that cannot be satisfactorily assigned to any physical region.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Cancer Diagnoses: Antrim

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will investigate the high number of cancer diagnoses being experienced in the Coast Road and Glens area of east Antrim.
(AQW 17562/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): I am advised that analysis of cancer rates in Northern Ireland indicates that the rates of cancer in the 'Glens of Antrim and Coastal Area' were not significantly different from Northern Ireland as a whole. My Department therefore does not intend to mount the investigation proposed by the Member.

Diabetes: Awareness

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is doing to promote diabetes awareness in North Down.
(AQW 17589/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust diabetes is managed in an integrated way, usually within GP Practices with Practice Nurses taking the lead. Diabetes Specialist Nurses (DSNs) in the Trust provide an ongoing point of contact and source of information for GPs, Practice Nurses, District Nurses, nursing home staff, Allied Health Professionals (AHPs) and the public. DSNs attend shared care visits with Consultants to GP practices, meeting with GPs and practice nurses to update them on changes in services including, for example, patient education programmes, telemonitoring and advances in treatment.

Diabetes Specialist Nurses are available to attend health fairs on request, offering people the opportunity to have their blood sugar checked and to receive advice depending on the result. They also make available information relating to diabetes and its symptoms in public areas such as GP practices and libraries as well as responding to invitations to speak at community groups. In addition, all health professionals who interact with the public, including Health Visitors, GPs, District Nurses and AHPs, have the responsibility to deliver health promotion messages.

Transforming Your Care

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when the Community Plans will be included in Transforming Your Care.
(AQW 17740/11-15)

Mr Poots: Community Planning is based on partnership working at regional, local and neighbourhood levels to create a long term vision for promoting the well-being of an area for the benefit of the local population. Transforming Your Care (TYC) proposes closer co-ordination of health and social care provision in order to provide a seamless service for users, basing services around the needs of the individual rather than institutions. The TYC reforms are needed to ensure that there are safe, resilient and sustainable health and social care services available to communities for the future. The Community Plans and TYC should complement each other for the benefit of local populations.

The public consultation on the proposed changes emerging from Transforming Your Care runs until 15 January 2013. I would invite everyone with an interest in the future of our Health and Social Care to take the opportunity to comment on the proposals.

Charities: Funding

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what measures are in place to ensure that charities which receive funding from his Department are adequately balanced between frontline service provision and back office administration and management; and whether his Department has a role in scrutinising publicly funded charitable organisations to ensure that such organisations provide adequate advocacy provision in the event of long term sick leave by staff.
(AQW 17744/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department does not assess the mix of back office and front line staff in with providing funding to voluntary and community organisations. Differing business models will be used by organisations dependent on the type of work they are carrying out. Rather, funding is provided to organisations based on the delivery of health and well being outcomes that align with departmental objectives. Monitoring takes place throughout the year to ensure objectives and contractual grant requirements are met.

Organisations are required to obey employment law and one of the terms of funding requires them to comply with Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998.

Officials are currently assessing voluntary and community funding procedures with the aim of delivering a flexible funding process that aligns with the changing health and social care needs of the local population.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Interpreter Fees

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much each Health and Social Care Trust has spent on interpreter Fees in each of the last five years; and whether Trusts are legally obliged to offer interpreters.

(AQW 17753/11-15)

Mr Poots: Expenditure by each Health and Social Care Trust on interpreter fees, in each of the last five years, is set out in the table below.

	2011/12	2010/11	2009/10	2008/09	2007/08
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust	£527,467	£448,576	£412,739	£251,520	£171,322
Northern Health & Social Care Trust	£293,372	£295,496	£334,437	£240,920	£229,881
South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust	£110,507	£93,600	£81,273	£68,122	£62,071
Southern Health & Social Care Trust	£919,547	£919,977	£749,889	£609,835	£582,285
Western Health & Social Care Trust	£196,299	£166,239	£172,699	£121,192	£140,752
Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Health & Social Care Trust	£772	£2,357	£1,208	£830	£1,101
	£2,047,964	£1,926,245	£1,752,245	£1,292,419	£1,187,412

All Health and Social Care Trusts are legally obliged to provide interpreters to patients and clients in Northern Ireland who do not speak English as a first or second proficient language.

Vacancy Control

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17165/11-15, why information is not available on the current number of posts unfilled in consequence of vacancy control measures; and whether the information can be obtained.

(AQW 17761/11-15)

Mr Poots: Vacancy controls were introduced to ensure that organisations are able to manage their workforces effectively and to safeguard employment. In instances where vacancy control measures are used to support organisational change such posts are normally filled on a short term basis (for example through the use of temporary/ bank staff) or services may be covered through the reprioritisation / re-organisation of associated workload in the short term.

As the situation in respect of vacancy controls is fluid, any information provided would be a snapshot and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost. It is fundamental that safe and effective services are delivered and HSC Trusts have assured me that where posts are essential to frontline services they will be filled promptly.

Pain Services: Consultants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of consultants providing specialist pain services in each Health and Social Care Trust; and to outline the roles of the support staff working in each of the associated pain service units.

(AQW 17803/11-15)

Mr Poots: Specialist Pain Consultants

The following table shows the number, specialty and approximate clinic hours per week for consultants providing specialist pain services in each Health and Social Care Trust. All information below was provided directly by the Health and Social Care Trusts and has not been validated by the Department.

HSC Trust	Consultant Specialty	Headcount	Approx. Clinic Time Per Week
Belfast	Anaesthetics with a special interest in pain medicine	5	33.5 hours outpatient clinics, 26 hours day cases, 4 hours Pain Management Programme
Northern	Anaesthetics	2	4 outpatient chronic pain sessions (14 hours), 2.75 day case chronic pain sessions
Southern	Anaesthetics (Chronic Pain)	2	4.5 outpatient sessions, 2 day case sessions

HSC Trust	Consultant Specialty	Headcount	Approx. Clinic Time Per Week
South-Eastern	Chronic Pain	4	49.5 hours
	Acute Pain	1	4.5 hours
Western	Anaesthetics	2	16-20 hours outpatients, 8-10 hours for procedure lists.

Support Staff in associated pain service units

Belfast HSC Trust

Chronic Pain Nursing Team: The nursing team hold outpatient clinics, telephone review clinics, and offer treatment within a health and wellbeing centre.

Allied Health Professions: Assist with the Pain Management Programme (PMP) at Belfast City Hospital.

Psychology Services: Assist with the PMP and provide Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Course (ACTS) at Belfast City Hospital and at a health and wellbeing centre.

Imaging and theatre staff: This staff group assist with every day case theatre list provided for chronic pain interventions.

Northern HSC Trust

The Northern Trust's chronic pain service does not have designated support staff.

Southern HSC Trust

The Southern Trust's consultants are supported by a GP with a special interest who holds two outpatient sessions per week, and a Specialist Nurse who runs TENS clinics and carries out telephone reviews of patients.

South-Eastern HSC Trust

Chronic Pain

The South-Eastern Trust's Chronic Pain unit consists of an Associate Specialist doctor and a GP with a special interest in chronic pain, each of whom hold 2 clinics for a total of 18 clinic hours per week. They are supported by 2 Specialist Nurses, who hold 3 nurse-led clinics per week and run a telephone support line for patients, and by 2 Band 5 Nurses.

Acute Pain

The South-Eastern Trust's Acute Pain unit consists of three Specialist Nurses, with the input of an anaesthetist when required.

Western HSC Trust

The Western Trust's two consultants are supported by an Associate Specialist. Allied Health Professionals and nursing staff provide a multi-disciplinary pain management programme on the Tyrone County Hospital site, along with a nurse-led acupuncture and TENS service and telephone review service. Altnagelvin also has a nurse-led acupuncture and TENS service, and a planned nurse-led telephone review service for the future.

Programme for Government: Delivery Plans

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when he will publish the delivery plans for the Programme for Government.

(AQW 17812/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Programme for Government delivery framework is centrally managed through OFMDFM. It is through this framework, which was agreed by the Executive, that Delivery Plans will be published. Delivery Plans for my Department have also been shared with the Health Committee through normal business processes.

Autistic Spectrum Disorder

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the (i) number of people who are waiting to be assessed for Autistic Spectrum Disorder; and (ii) average waiting time, broken down by (a) postcode; and (b) constituency.

(AQW 17823/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of people waiting to be assessed for Autistic Spectrum Disorder is not available by either postcode or constituency. Figures provided by the Health and Social Care Board indicate that at 31st October 2012, 588 children were waiting to be assessed for suspected Autism in Northern Ireland.

Average waiting times between referral and assessment are not available centrally or from the HSC Board. Information from the HSC Board is available in terms of waiting times by HSC Trust and by time bands. These figures are outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Waiting Times by Trust (31st October 2012)

HSC Trust	>13 Weeks	8 – 13 Weeks	4 – 8 Weeks	0 – 4 Weeks	Total
Belfast	28	39	29	40	136
Northern	158	41	49	37	285
South Eastern	0	10	29	31	70
Southern	0	11	16	11	38
Western	1	18	20	20	59
Total	187	119	143	139	588

Source: HSC Board

These figures have not been validated by Community Information Branch

Fire and Rescue Service: Stolen Cars

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17133/11-15, to detail (i) the stations from which the eighteen scrap cars were stolen; (ii) the parts that were stolen from scrap cars at each station; (iii) the cost of replacing stolen parts and cars during this period; and (iv) the suppliers from which replacement parts or cars were sourced.

(AQW 17844/11-15)

Mr Poots: The table below details -

- (i) the Stations from which the 18 scrap cars were stolen; and
- (ii) the parts that were stolen.

Station	Number Of Cars	Parts Stolen
Westland	3	
Springfield	2	
Clogher	1	
Belleek	2	
Crumlin	2	
Cushendall	2	
Keady	1	
Bangor	3	
Ballywalter	2	
Ballyclare		Alloy Wheels
Belleek		Alloy Wheels
Cushendall		Wheels, Axle
Total	18	

(iii) and (iv) The items stolen were not replaced.

Paediatric Cardiac Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what assurances he can give that the final decision on Children's Paediatric Cardiac care will provide a safer service than the present arrangements.

(AQW 17855/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can reassure the Member that my overriding concern is for the safety of these very vulnerable children and in obtaining the best possible treatment and care for them. I have repeatedly stated that my aim is to ensure a safe and sustainable service into the future.

I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to consider the safety and sustainability of the services in Belfast and to look at the potential of an all-island model as well as considering a model which includes arrangements with other centres in the UK. Officials from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are therefore currently discussing a potential model for delivering this service.

I understand that the Working Group is aiming to conclude its work in early 2013 and I plan to take a decision on the way forward as soon as possible thereafter. The timescale for this exercise should enable the Group to produce a comprehensive and robust report.

Paediatric Cardiac Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the discussions which his departmental officials have held with health officials in the Republic of Ireland in relation to the future of Children's Paediatric Cardiac care in Northern Ireland.

(AQW 17856/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can reassure the Member that my overriding concern is for the safety of these very vulnerable children and in obtaining the best possible treatment and care for them. I have repeatedly stated that my aim is to ensure a safe and sustainable service into the future.

I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to consider the safety and sustainability of the services in Belfast and to look at the potential of an all-island model as well as considering a model which includes arrangements with other centres in the UK. Officials from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are therefore currently discussing a potential model for delivering this service.

I understand that the Working Group is aiming to conclude its work in early 2013 and I plan to take a decision on the way forward as soon as possible thereafter. The timescale for this exercise should enable the Group to produce a comprehensive and robust report.

Transportation: Critically Ill Children

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the transport standards followed by Health Trusts in relation to the transportation of critically ill children.

(AQW 17857/11-15)

Mr Poots: CONNECCT (Child or Neonate Needing Emergency Critical Care Transport) is the specialist transport service for critically ill children in Northern Ireland. The service undertakes transfers of critically ill children and neonates between hospitals. The CONNECCT service is staffed by specialist doctors and nurses with expertise in critical care and transport of sick children and newborns.

The Health and Social Care Board is undertaking a robust analysis of the current paediatric retrieval and transfer system in Northern Ireland. The work is being carried out by a team with representatives from CONNECCT, Health and Social Care Trusts, Paediatric Intensive Care Unit, the Critical Care Network and parent representatives. The team is developing standards for critical care transport of children and neonates. These standards will be based on standards from professional organisations such as the Paediatric Intensive Care Society and the British Association for Perinatal Medicine.

Paediatric Cardiac Care

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for his assessment of the timescale for the working group on the future of Children's Paediatric Cardiac surgery; and the impact of the timescale on the group's output.

(AQW 17861/11-15)

Mr Poots: I can reassure the Member that my overriding concern is for the safety of these very vulnerable children and in obtaining the best possible treatment and care for them. I have repeatedly stated that my aim is to ensure a safe and sustainable service into the future.

I have asked the Health and Social Care Board to consider the safety and sustainability of the services in Belfast and to look at the potential of an all-island model as well as considering a model which includes arrangements with other centres in the UK. Officials from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are therefore currently discussing a potential model for delivering this service.

I understand that the Working Group is aiming to conclude its work in early 2013 and I plan to take a decision on the way forward as soon as possible thereafter. The timescale for this exercise should enable the Group to produce a comprehensive and robust report.

Food Safety Promotion Board: Community Background

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 1254/11-15, to detail the outcome of the monitoring of community background of the staff of the Food Safety Promotion Board which he requested.

(AQW 17882/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer the Member to the answer that I gave to AQW 9357/11-15 on 23 March 2012. As of 12 December 2012 the position is unchanged.

Suicide Prevention

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for a breakdown of the £32 million allocated for suicide prevention in each of the last six years.

(AQW 17923/11-15)

Mr Poots: For the period 2009 to 2012, this information is available at Appendix I of the report "Evaluation of the Implementation of the Protect Life Suicide Prevention Strategy and Action Plan 2006-2011", which was published on the DHSSPS website on 31 October 2012.

The detailed breakdown for each of the years from 2006 to 2009 is set out below:

Implementation Initiative	Funding 2006/07	Funding 2007/08	Funding 2008/09
Community led initiatives	£500k	£1.8m	£2.060m
Self Harm Pilot Schemes	£220k	£300k	£200k
Public Awareness/Regional Training	£930k	£550k	£550k
All-Island co-operation	-	£90k	150k
Research	£200k	£150k	£220k
Evaluation	-	£50k	-
Infrastructure	-	£100k	-
Events & Miscellaneous	£50k	£30k	£20k
Lifeline			£3.5m
Totals	£1.9m	£3.07m	£6.7m

Mefipristone

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline the circumstances in which the drug Mefipristone (RU 486) can be used.

(AQW 17928/11-15)

Mr Poots: According to the specified terms for its marketing authorisation, the drug mifepristone (Mifegyne®) is licensed for use in the following therapeutic indications:

- 1 Medical termination of developing intra-uterine pregnancy. (In sequential use with a prostaglandin analogue, up to 63 days of amenorrhoea)
- 2 Softening and dilatation of the cervix uteri prior to surgical termination of pregnancy during the first trimester.
- 3 Preparation for the action of prostaglandin analogues in the termination of pregnancy for medical reasons (beyond the first trimester).
- 4 Labour induction in foetal death in utero. (In patients where prostaglandin or oxytocin cannot be used).

The terms for marketing authorisation also state that for termination of pregnancy, Mifegyne® (and the prostaglandin) can only be prescribed and administered in accordance with the countries national laws and regulations.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Chairman and Chief Executive

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust enjoy the confidence of the Minister.

(AQW 17938/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Written Statement to the Assembly on 14 December explained why I have terminated Mr Jim Stewart's appointment as Chairman of the Northern Health and Social Care Trust with effect from that date.

The Trust faces major challenges in delivering the quality of services that the public deserves. I announced, in my Written Statement to the Assembly on 10 December the appointment of a Turn Around and support Team to the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. I expect the Chief Executive to demonstrate leadership to implement changes identified by the significant support which is being provided to the Trust, and ensure that performance improves and that the public has full confidence in the Trust. In doing so, I know he can rely on the professionalism and dedication of all staff working at the Northern HSC Trust.

Drug Abuse: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to prevent drug abuse amongst young people in North Down.

(AQW 17959/11-15)

Mr Poots: I refer you to the answer provided to AQW 16139/11-15, which contained information on the range of substance misuse services, from prevention to treatment and support, available to all age groups in the North Down area.

Social Services Client Administration and Retrieval Environment System (SOSCARE)

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to enhance the current Social Services Client Administration and Retrieval Environment system.

(AQW 17961/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Social Services Client Administration and Retrieval Environment System (SOSCARE) was implemented in the mid eighties as a stand-alone system meeting the needs of Social Services. The technology that the system is based on is now largely obsolete and the system is not integrated with other systems, making it difficult to share the information held on SOSCARE with other staff involved in delivering care to service users.

It is planned that SOSCARE will gradually be phased out over the next 3-4 years with only essential software changes / upgrades considered in order to keep the system running.

Autism: Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) children; and (ii) adults living in the Strabane district have been diagnosed with autism.

(AQW 17971/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Western Health and Social Care Trust indicate that in the period from 2009 to 18th December 2012, 66 children living in the Strabane district were diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) including Asperger's Syndrome. The Trust figures show that less than five adults resident in the Strabane district were diagnosed with ASD.

In the period from 2009 to 18th December 2012, 119 children living within the Strabane District had undergone or were undergoing a formal assessment for suspected Autism. The Western Health and Social Care Trust were unable to provide figures for the number of adults living in the Strabane district who have undergone or were undergoing a formal assessment for Autism.

Autism: Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many (i) children; and (ii) adults living in the Strabane district are undergoing, or have undergone, a formal assessment for autism.

(AQW 17972/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures provided by the Western Health and Social Care Trust indicate that in the period from 2009 to 18th December 2012, 66 children living in the Strabane district were diagnosed with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) including Asperger's Syndrome. The Trust figures show that less than five adults resident in the Strabane district were diagnosed with ASD.

In the period from 2009 to 18th December 2012, 119 children living within the Strabane District had undergone or were undergoing a formal assessment for suspected Autism. The Western Health and Social Care Trust were unable to provide figures for the number of adults living in the Strabane district who have undergone or were undergoing a formal assessment for Autism.

Autism: Assessments

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether there is a time differential for an autism assessment to be made in each of the Health and Social Care Trust areas.

(AQW 17973/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Health and Social Care Board expects that all Trusts will ensure that, in respect of children, no child should wait more than 13 weeks for access to an autism assessment. There is presently no specific target for adult access to autism assessments.

Within Children's services, both the Northern and Belfast Trusts have recently experienced difficulties meeting this regional target, however recovery plans have been established and will be overseen by the Health and Social Care Board.

The Adult Autism Care Pathway was launched in June of this year and the Health and Social Care Trusts have started to implement the Pathway. Therefore, it is not currently possible to provide data on the numbers of adults waiting for an

assessment. However, the HSC Board has begun preparations for monitoring waiting times in adult services and this will commence in 2013.

Autism: Strabane

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in relation to autism services provision within the Western Health and Social Care Trust area, whether there is a Children's Needs Assessment Worker or Social Worker designated to deal with cases based in the Strabane district.

(AQW 17975/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Children's Autism Service team within the Western Health and Social Care Trust has 3.0 WTE permanent and 2.0 WTE temporary Social Work posts. They are part of a multi-disciplinary Trust-wide team which also comprises Clinical Psychology, Community Paediatrics, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Autism Practitioner and Specialist Health Visitors. All specialist ASD staff are involved in training, support and direct work with families in conjunction with an array of Trust, statutory and voluntary services as required following a comprehensive assessment of need. There is not a specific Children's Needs Assessment Worker.

Children's autism services are based in three locations across the Western Trust - Riverdell, Omagh; South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen; and Aberfoyle Terrace, Londonderry.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Registered Child Minders

Ms McGahan asked Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of registered child minders in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area, broken down by geographical area.

(AQW 17988/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information on the number of registered child minders cannot be disaggregated by geographical areas smaller than the Health and Social Care Trusts. At year ending 31 March 2012 there were 604 registered child minders for children aged under 12 years in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area.

This information can be found in 'Children's Social Care Statistics for Northern Ireland 2011/12' published on the Department's website

http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/stats-cib/statistics_and_research-cib-pub/children_statistics/stats-cib-children_order.htm

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Children in Care

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of children living in care in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last four years, broken down by (i) the number of children in care for less than one year; (ii) the number of children in care for more than one year; (iii) geographic location; (iv) religion; (v) ethnic background; and (vi) the reason for being in care.

(AQW 17989/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of children in care in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last four years broken down by length of time in care, religion and ethnicity are detailed in the tables below. Information on the religious and ethnic backgrounds of children in care is not centrally available for 2009 and 2010 and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Information on the geographic location of children in care cannot be disaggregated below the level of Health and Social Care Trust area. Figures are not available centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost in regards of the reasons for children being in care.

Table 1: Children in Care in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust by Length of Time in Care at 31st March

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Less than One Year in Care	125	123	123	107
More than One Year in Care	245	280	284	313
Total	370	403	407	420

Source: Community Information Branch Children Order Returns/Delegated Statutory Functions Corporate Parenting Returns

Table 2: Children in Care in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust by Religion at 31st March

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Catholic	-	-	228	273
Protestant ¹	-	-	69	112

	2009	2010	2011	2012
Other ²	-	-	110	35
Total	370	403	407	420

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions/Corporate Parenting Returns

- (1) Protestant contains Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Church of England, Methodist & Other Christian
 (2) Other contains Jewish, Muslim, Other, Not Known, Not Completed, None and Refused

Table 3: Children in Care in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust by Ethnic Background at 31st March

	2009	2010	2011	2012
White	-	-	340	403
Other ¹	-	-	19	12
Not Known ²	-	-	48	4
Total	370	403	407	420

Source: Delegated Statutory Functions/Corporate Parenting Returns

- (1) Other contains Black, Chinese, Indian, Irish Traveler & Other
 (2) Not Known contains Not Completed and Refused

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when work will start to build the single dwellings for residential care at Ravara, Kilcooley Bangor.

(AQW 18001/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust's proposal to close Ravara House Residential Home is currently out for Public Consultation which does not close until 17 January 2013. No date for commencement of any potential new build can be set until the consultation has been completed and a final decision made on the proposal.

There are currently 3 permanent residents remaining in Ravara House Residential Home awaiting their choice of alternative accommodation. All former residents who would meet the selection criteria for Supported Housing accommodation will be afforded the opportunity to move into any new build should that be decided as the way forward

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether all the former residents of Ravara House in Bangor have been found alternative residential care places.

(AQW 18002/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust's proposal to close Ravara House Residential Home is currently out for Public Consultation which does not close until 17 January 2013. No date for commencement of any potential new build can be set until the consultation has been completed and a final decision made on the proposal.

There are currently 3 permanent residents remaining in Ravara House Residential Home awaiting their choice of alternative accommodation. All former residents who would meet the selection criteria for Supported Housing accommodation will be afforded the opportunity to move into any new build should that be decided as the way forward

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust is doing to ensure that the Ravara House residential home site in Bangor is secured against vandalism.

(AQW 18003/11-15)

Mr Poots: The review of the future of Ravara House is currently the subject of Public Consultation until 17th January 2013. No decisions have been made regarding securing the building against vandalism or demolition as Ravara House Residential Home is still operating as a Residential Home.

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety when Ravara House in Bangor will be demolished.

(AQW 18004/11-15)

Mr Poots: The review of the future of Ravara House is currently the subject of Public Consultation until 17th January 2013. No decisions have been made regarding securing the building against vandalism or demolition as Ravara House Residential Home is still operating as a Residential Home.

Ravara House Residential Home, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he can give an assurance that former residents of Ravara House will be given first option on the new single dwelling accommodation for residential care at Ravara in Bangor.

(AQW 18005/11-15)

Mr Poots: The South Eastern HSC Trust's proposal to close Ravara House Residential Home is currently out for Public Consultation which does not close until 17 January 2013. No date for commencement of any potential new build can be set until the consultation has been completed and a final decision made on the proposal.

There are currently 3 permanent residents remaining in Ravara House Residential Home awaiting their choice of alternative accommodation. All former residents who would meet the selection criteria for Supported Housing accommodation will be afforded the opportunity to move into any new build should that be decided as the way forward

Emergency Services Youth Engagement Programme

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what work his Department has done to assist the Ambulance and Fire Services to develop their Emergency Services Youth Engagement Programme.

(AQW 18013/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Ireland Ambulance and Fire and Rescue Services do not have a specific "Emergency Services Youth Engagement Programme".

My Department funds both the Ambulance and the Fire and Rescue Services, which individually allocate funding for community education initiatives, including the following:

NI FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE (NIFRS)

LIFE (Local Intervention Fire Education) Scheme:

builds essential life skills for teenagers such as teamwork and personal responsibility; and helps to develop leadership skills and confidence.

Cadet Fire fighter Scheme: voluntary youth organisation within the Fire and Rescue Service providing activities, raising awareness of the Service, and instilling community spirit and personal development.

The Fire setters Scheme: early intervention and education programme for children and young people who are fire setting.

Schools' Programmes:

- Francis the Firefly – aimed at pre-school children (3-5 years);
- Safety Team – aimed at Key Stage 2 primary 5 classes;
- Firestorm – aimed at Key Stage 3 post primary Year 9 pupils.

Roadsafe Roadshow: collaboration between the Police Service of Northern Ireland, NIFRS, Ambulance Service, an A&E Consultant, Road Trauma Support Group and a local commercial radio station directed at year 13 and 14 pupils.

RACE Scheme (Road Accident Consequences Education): developed for young people 14–25 years.

NI AMBULANCE SERVICE (NIAS)

Young people stakeholder group: this proactively educates about issues that directly impact on NIAS's response to 140,000 emergency calls per year.

Community Education Programme - messages delivered on hoax calls, inappropriate use of the service, violence against staff and NIAS as a prospective employer.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, in light of the assurances from the Public Health Agency and Commissioners that the process would be limited and focused because of the constrained timeframe, whether the Safe and Sustainable report on Paediatric Cardiac Surgery in Northern Ireland was constructed in the same way as for other centres in England and Wales.

(AQW 18014/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following concerns expressed regarding the long term sustainability of the Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Service (PCCS) in Belfast I announced on 29 March 2012 that the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) would carry out a review of

PCCS in NI. In doing so, the Board commissioned an Expert Panel from England to carry out an independent review of the service in Belfast using standards that were used to assess centres elsewhere in the UK.

As part of the review the Expert Panel met directly and separately with two patient groups. In addition, patient representatives and families of children with congenital cardiac problems have been part of the working group established by the HSC Board and Public Health Agency (PHA) to develop proposals for the future provision of this service for Northern Ireland. A consultation document was issued on 25th September and throughout the consultation process the HSCB and PHA will carry out a full and open consultation with patients, families and their representatives.

Paediatric Cardiac Surgery

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether, during the Safe and Sustainable review team assessment of Paediatric Cardiac Surgery in Northern Ireland, parents and families were given one hour to meet with the review panel during their visit, with no prior consultation or engagement, whereas in England and Wales, the review had an extensive consultation with parents, families and stakeholders, which started in 2009 and continued through engagement and public consultation until 2012.

(AQW 18015/11-15)

Mr Poots: Following concerns expressed regarding the long term sustainability of the Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Service (PCCS) in Belfast I announced on 29 March 2012 that the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) would carry out a review of PCCS in NI. In doing so, the Board commissioned an Expert Panel from England to carry out an independent review of the service in Belfast using standards that were used to assess centres elsewhere in the UK.

As part of the review the Expert Panel met directly and separately with two patient groups. In addition, patient representatives and families of children with congenital cardiac problems have been part of the working group established by the HSC Board and Public Health Agency (PHA) to develop proposals for the future provision of this service for Northern Ireland. A consultation document was issued on 25th September and throughout the consultation process the HSCB and PHA will carry out a full and open consultation with patients, families and their representatives.

Invest to Save Initiative

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how his Department arrived at an estimate of nearly £26m recurring savings in 2014/15 resulting from the recent Invest to Save allocation.

(AQW 18016/11-15)

Mr Poots: The recurring savings of £26m by 2014/15 were estimated based on a number of key assumptions underpinning each of the four elements of the Invest to Save bid (Integrated Care Partnerships ('ICPs'), Service Changes, Implementation Support and Voluntary Redundancy/Voluntary Early Retirement ('VR/VER') schemes):

- In terms of ICPs, savings were based on an estimate of the number of Emergency Department attendances and Inpatient admissions that could be avoided annually by the proposed establishment of ICPs.
- In relation to service changes, savings are anticipated from a reduction in beds and beddays as a result of cardiology/diagnostics and stroke service changes and a reduction in the required number of domiciliary care packages as a result of reablement initiatives.
- The investment in dedicated implementation support, from both external and internal resources, is anticipated to be critical in the delivery of savings through acute sector reforms, staff productivity savings and social care reform as a result of service model changes.
- Savings are also anticipated as a result of workforce reductions associated with the implementation of VR/VER schemes.

Southern Health and Social Care Trust: Children in Care

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the reasons for the 7 percent increase in the number of children living in care for a less than a year in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 18042/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Trust has advised that the reasons for the increase in the number of children living in care for less than a year are due to a combination of a number of factors including:

- the development of a Frontline Fostering pilot for young people aged over 12 years which ensures more intensive and timely assessments to maximise the opportunities for early intervention in, and resolution of, family difficulties and hence the young person's earlier discharge home;
- a focus on the completion of more timely, concise and succinct assessments, including expert assessments where required, to enhance rehabilitation outcomes for Looked After Children;
- the increasing focus on kinship placements as early as possible in a child's care pathway and greater consideration of Residence Orders at an early stage in care proceedings;
- a small increase in the number of adoptions of young babies by consent, which means they are admitted to, and discharged from, care in less than a year.

South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust: Complaints

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many complaints have been submitted to the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust in each of the last three years.

(AQW 18076/11-15)

Mr Poots: It should be noted that a complaint is defined as an 'expression of dissatisfaction' received from or on behalf of patients, clients or other users of a HSC Trust's services or facilities; although, a single communication regarding a complaint may refer to more than one issue. In such cases each individual complaint issue is recorded separately.

Number of Complaint Issues Received by the South Eastern HSC Trust (2009/10 – 2011/12)

Year	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Number of Complaints Issues	977	1,182	1,172

Source: DHSSPS CH8 Statistical Return

During 2011/12, 1,172 complaint issues were received by the South Eastern HSC Trust, similar to 2010/11 (1,182) but higher than 2009/10 (977).

Department of Justice

HMP Maghaberry: Prisoner Held Under False Name

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16110/11-15, given that people have varying levels of previous criminal records which will affect their prison sentence, what action he intends to take to ensure that a prisoner is admitted into custody, served the appropriate tariff and held in conditions relevant to their circumstances.

(AQW 17467/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): Prisoners can only be committed to a prison upon receipt of a warrant issued by a court. This warrant identifies the prisoner being committed by name, address and date of birth. The Northern Ireland Prison Service relies upon information provided by others, notably the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service, to ensure that prisoners committed to custody are held appropriately and according to their circumstances, and that they serve the appropriate length of time in custody.

Prior to committal, identification of those prisoners committed by the court after passing through PSNI custody will have been checked against PSNI and mainland police databases. This information is shared with NIPS on committal and checked against existing Prison Service data.

When an individual is unknown to the PSNI, or has been found to have been committed under an alias, the PSNI and NIPS will merge their identification information to establish the existence of any outstanding warrants which can then be served on the prisoner by the PSNI.

NIPS also conducts background checks for all previously merged individuals across its custodial data from 2009 onwards. Further checks are conducted by NIPS as part of its discharge validation process, 21 days prior to a prisoner's final release. These checks are designed to ensure that no outstanding warrants exist which may impact upon an individual's release.

Courthouse Closures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the closure of four courthouses (i) whether the remaining cases will be absorbed into the existing lists at the relevant courthouse or will specific courts be held at the relevant courthouse; and (ii) whether he has made provision for additional judicial, security and clerical staff required to accommodate either options.

(AQW 17468/11-15)

Mr Ford: While it is open to a judge to adjourn a case to any available sitting, the closure proposals are based on the capacity of the alternative court locations to accommodate the Hearing Centre business as separate court sittings and are not designed to reduce the number of sittings.

The appropriate number of sittings at a particular venue is a matter for the Lord Chief Justice and any future change would be a matter for his discretion.

The anticipated savings outlined in the proposals have been based on the retention of separate court sittings for the current Hearing Centre business and the associated cost of judiciary, security and clerical staff.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Misconduct

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, from 2000 to date, to detail (i) whether any Northern Ireland Prison Service staff were dismissed for gross misconduct and later granted ill-health retirement on the recommendation of the Prison Service;

(ii) the date of each dismissal and retirement; (iii) the nature of the gross misconduct; (iv) any criminal convictions, court proceedings or informal police action taken as a result; and (v) the level of staff involved in each case.

(AQW 17469/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service does not hold any records in relation to staff dismissed for gross misconduct and subsequently granted ill-health retirement.

Counterfeit Food

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice how many people have been (i) prosecuted; and (ii) convicted for selling counterfeit food in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17474/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF) has identified food fraud, including counterfeit food, as a potential emerging issue. A Food Fraud Task Force has recently been set up and includes representatives from both sides of the border.

Counterfeit food may be challenged by Local Councils and the Food Standards Agency (FSA) under intellectual property legislation. Offences may be prosecuted under Forgery and Counterfeiting Act 1981 and the Trade Marks Act 1994.

While the DoJ's databases do not break down convictions under this legislation by the nature of the product counterfeited, the Food Standards Agency has confirmed that between the FSA and Councils:

- in 2009/2010 there were 3 prosecutions;
- in 2010/2011 there were 6 prosecutions;
- in 2011/2012 there were 6 prosecutions.

Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 12701/11-15, for his assessment of whether this particular instance and the manner of Secretary of State approval would be regarded as anomalous.

(AQW 17500/11-15)

Mr Ford: I do not regard the Secretary of State's approval of the Code of Conduct and Discipline, nor the manner in which his approval was communicated, as being anomalous.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how the late payment directive currently passing through Westminster will affect his Department.

(AQW 17547/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice will liaise with the Department of Finance and Personnel to implement any necessary changes arising from Directive 2011/7/EU on Combating Late Payment in Commercial Transactions which requires public bodies to have a maximum 30 day payment term (with limited exceptions such as the healthcare sector). In particular, the Department will work closely with Account NI to continue to maximise the number of invoices paid within 30 days.

The Department is committed to ensuring that suppliers continue to receive payments within the contractual terms and therefore minimise the level of interest and compensation claims that need to be paid.

The Department (including the core and five executive agencies) has sustained a high level of compliance with the 30 day target over the last three financial years as outlined below:

Financial Year	Number of invoices paid	% of invoices paid within 30 days
2010-11	49,729	99%
2011-12	46,769	98%
2012-13*	25,268	98%

* 7 months to October 2012

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Justice how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17548/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below provides details of the performance of Department of Justice (DOJ) arm's length bodies against the 30 Day Payment Performance Target during the period April to October 2012.

	Total Number of Invoices Paid	Total Number of Invoices Paid Within 30 days	% of Invoices Paid Within 30 Days
Police Service of Northern Ireland	53,929	53,317	98.9%
Northern Ireland Policing Board	1,244	1,244	100.0%
Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland	1,130	1,130	100.0%
Northern Ireland Police Fund	80	80	100.0%
RUC George Cross Foundation	62	62	100.0%
Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission*	448	442	98.7%
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	3,217	3,156	98.1%
Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland	230	204	88.7%
Northern Ireland Law Commission	103	103	100.0%
Policing Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust	1,218	898	73.7%
Prisoner Ombudsman	125	120	96.0%
Independent Monitoring Boards	99	99	100.0%

* Information relating to 30 day performance is not available – details provided relate to the number of invoices paid within 10 working days.

Department of Justice arm's length bodies pay all supplier invoices as soon as the necessary checks and validation processes have been completed. There is no distinction made between individual suppliers and no specific sector has been paid more quickly than others.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Change Managers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Managers are (i) brought in from outside Northern Ireland, (ii) whether they travel to and from Northern Ireland on a weekly basis, (iii) the cost of travel and accommodation to date and (iv) what is the projected final cost.

(AQW 17553/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organisational Change Manager for the Northern Ireland Prison Service is seconded to the Prison Service by the Strategic Investment Board on a three year fixed term contract, finishing in March 2015.

He travels to Northern Ireland each week and is entitled to reclaim expenses up to a maximum of £20,000 per annum for travel and accommodation against actual costs incurred. To date £10,035.88 has been reclaimed.

The maximum projected final cost for travel and accommodation is £60,000 for the duration of the contract.

Northern Ireland Prison Service Ombudsman: Action on Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, following the reports by the Northern Ireland Prison Service Ombudsman into the deaths in custody of Samuel Carson and Frances McKeown, (i) will he review the Supporting Prisoners at Risk procedures to have them remain open on all prisoners who have attempted suicide or been deemed vulnerable and (ii) for his assessment of gradually downgrading the risk when a prisoner shows improvement rather than removing it.

(AQW 17555/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) There is currently no intention to review the Supporting Prisoner at Risk (SPAR) procedures to have them remain open on all prisoners who have attempted suicide or been deemed vulnerable.
- (ii) If the multi-disciplinary case conference agree that the risks initially displayed have been sufficiently reduced or mitigated to a level that enables the individual to cope, they will decide to close the SPAR.

Courthouse Closures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, in relation to the closure of four courthouses/hearing centres, to outline (i) any discussion he has held with the Chief Constable to ensure that policing districts are linked with court divisions to allow the relevant arresting officer, investigating officer and charging station to be able to stay with the case if it moves division and (ii) if not, how he intends to address this.

(AQW 17557/11-15)

Mr Ford: Officials in the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service held discussions on the closure of the Hearing Centres with senior members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

The PSNI is broadly supportive of the closure proposals and in response to the consultation confirmed they would not cause significant operational difficulties.

Current policing district boundaries are not co-terminous with court boundaries.

Personal Injury Claims

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail the average time it takes to process personal injury claims and what steps his Department is taking to try to reduce the processing time of these claims.

(AQW 17558/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the average time taken to decide personal injury claims (under the Tariff Scheme) at First Decision Stage and at Review Stage. The statistics demonstrate an improvement in terms of the time taken to process personal injury claims. The Agency is committed to continually improving its business processes but the age and configuration of its current technology limits the extent to which this can be delivered. The Agency has accepted the recommendation made by the Justice Committee following its Inquiry into Services Available to Victims and Witnesses of Crime. The Committee's report highlighted a number of operational matters related to how the Agency currently delivers its compensation schemes. These included the need to streamline operational processes and to speed up processing of claims. The Agency's Chief Executive will review operational arrangements to ensure that the issues raised by the Committee are dealt with.

Year	Average Time to process personal injury claims at First Decision Stage	Average Time to process personal injury claims at Review Stage
2010/11	48 weeks	18 weeks
2011/12	45 weeks	17.5 weeks

High Court Case

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether (i) Legal Aid was granted to the convicted sex offender who proceeded with a High Court case against Facebook and (ii) the total cost broken down by (a) law firm and (b) counsel and if this is not available to provide an estimate.

(AQW 17560/11-15)

Mr Ford: Article 24 of the Legal Aid, Advice and Assistance (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 prohibits the disclosure of information relating to both an application for and the grant of civil legal aid without the consent of the applicant. As the disclosure of such information is an offence, I am therefore unable to provide any information relating to legal aid in this matter.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Civil Servants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many civil servants work in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, excluding Prison Officers.

(AQW 17561/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total number of staff employed in the NI Prison Service is 487. This number excludes those staff employed at Prison Officer and Governor grade.

Magherafelt Courthouse: Closure

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussion his Department had with the PSNI prior to his decision to close Magherafelt Courthouse.

(AQW 17613/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW/17557/11-15.

Hydebank Wood: Former Governor

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in relation to Gary Alcock, the former governor of Hydebank (i) on what date was he suspended pending an enquiry; (ii) when did he return to work; (iii) on what grounds was he suspended; (iv) what was the outcome of the enquiry; (v) was he charged with any disciplinary offence; and if so (vi) was he found guilty and what action was taken.

(AQW 17616/11-15)

Mr Ford: The requested information cannot be provided as disclosure would be contrary to the Data Protection Act 1998.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Change Managers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether accommodation is being rented for those assisting or involved as Change Managers in the Northern Ireland Prison Service, and if so, what is the weekly cost.

(AQW 17617/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Organisational Change Manager for the Northern Ireland Prison Service is responsible for making his own accommodation arrangements while in Northern Ireland but is entitled to reclaim expenses up to a maximum of £20,000 per annum for travel and accommodation against actual costs incurred. To date a total of £10,035.88 has been reclaimed.

Courthouse Closures

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice following the closure of four Courthouses/hearing centres, does he intend to create new court divisions or make provision for cases to be heard outside their respective county division.

(AQW 17619/11-15)

Mr Ford: The closure of Bangor and Larne Hearing Centres will not result in any change to County Court Divisions. Cases will continue to be heard within their respective County Court Division.

Limavady and Magherafelt Hearing Centres will not close until the implementation of a single jurisdiction for County and Magistrates' Court business.

Criminal Justice Inspection: Departmental Bodies

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to outline the type of internal departmental bodies that must be formally notified to the Criminal Justice Inspectorate.

(AQW 17638/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

- The Police Service of Northern Ireland
- The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland
- The Youth Justice Agency for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Prison Service
- The Police Ombudsman's Office for Northern Ireland
- The Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service
- The Parole Commissioners
- The Legal Services Commission
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
- The Compensation Agency
- The Health and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division
- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

Criminal Justice Inspection: Departmental Bodies

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the remit the Criminal Justice Inspectorate has in the inspection or monitoring of internal departmental bodies in other Departments.

(AQW 17639/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

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- The Compensation Agency
- The Health and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division
- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners

- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

Thompson House, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many people placed and residing at Thompson House, Belfast have been returned to custody, in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 17651/11-15)

Mr Ford: It is not possible to provide this information without incurring disproportionate cost in terms of probation staff time to conduct a manual search of all files.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Change Delivery Cost

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what has been the total cost to date of the Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Delivery team, and what is its budget for each of the next three years.

(AQW 17652/11-15)

Mr Ford: The total cost to 30 November 2012 for the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Change Programme team is £878,000. This team is responsible for addressing the recommendations from the Prison Review Team Final Report and delivering the objectives of the Strategic Efficiency and Effectiveness Programme.

NIPS is currently undertaking the detailed budget setting process for 2013/14 and all budgets will not be finalised until nearer the end of this financial year. Consequently the 2013/14 budget for the Change Programme team is not yet available. Similar exercises will take place in 2013/14 and 2014/15 to determine the budgets for 2014/15 and 2015/16 respectively.

Newry Magistrates Court: Disruption

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he has any plans to introduce legislation to prohibit disruption of proceedings and the glorification of terrorism during a court sitting in light of the disturbances in Newry Magistrates Court on 1 December 2012.

(AQW 17654/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I stated in my answer to AQW/8433/11-15, disruption of court proceedings is already prohibited in law as a contempt of court.

My answer to AQW 3936/11-15 indicated that it is also already an offence to glorify terrorism.

Thompson House, Belfast

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in relation to the upgrading of Thompson House, Belfast (i) how much funding his Department provided; and (ii) the level of funding from other sources and how it was spent.

(AQW 17655/11-15)

Mr Ford: My department has not provided any funding in relation to the refurbishment of Thompson House.

I understand that the Department for Social Development, through the Housing Executive, has awarded Housing Association Grant totalling £2.1 million for the upgrading and extension of this facility. Helm Housing, which now owns the property, contributed £0.2m through private borrowing. The total cost of £2.3m includes purchase of the property, construction and associated costs, including legal and administration costs.

Criminal Justice Inspection: Organisations Inspected

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice to detail the organisations that are inspected by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate.

(AQW 17659/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no requirement to formally notify any internal departmental body within the Department of Justice to Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland (CJINI). CJINI may inspect all criminal justice bodies, with the exception of the judiciary, to ensure that they are delivering the best possible service to all sections of the community. CJINI may also inspect other agencies where they impact upon the Criminal Justice system. The following organisations fall under CJINI's remit pursuant to section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002:

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- The Parole Commissioners
- The Legal Services Commission
- The Northern Ireland Social Security Agency
- The Compensation Agency
- The Health and Social Care Board & Trusts
- The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Division

- The The The Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland
- The Royal Mail Group
- Belfast Harbour Commissioners
- Larne Harbour Ltd
- Belfast International Airport Ltd
- The Northern Ireland Tourist Board
- Community Restorative Justice Schemes
- Probation and Bail Hostels.

Medical Pensions and Injury on Duty Awards: Guidance

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether the Guidance Booklet on Medical Pensions and Injury on Duty Awards, relevant to former police officers and issued by the Northern Ireland Policing Board, has been revised following his department's direction that Policing Division Circular 6/2007 must not be relied upon, and, if so, how was it revised and when. (AQW 17706/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Policing Board has confirmed that it has not to date revised the current (November 2011) Guidance Booklet on Medical Pensions and Injury on Duty (IoD) awards. Draft Guidance on IoD reviews is due to be presented to a National Attendance Management Forum of the United Kingdom wide police authorities in January 2013 which the Policing Board will then consider when reviewing the current guidance.

Percentage Disablement Reviews

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether the instructions approved and issued by the Northern Ireland Policing Board to Capita Health Solutions in regard to Percentage Disablement Reviews for retired police officers aged over 65 have been altered since 21 September 2009 and, if so, how were they altered and when. (AQW 17707/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Policing Board has confirmed the instructions remain the same. The Policing Board is content that the instructions are consistent with recent case law.

Percentage Disablement Reviews

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of whether the actions taken by the Northern Ireland Policing Board in relation to Percentage Disablement Reviews for retired police officers aged over 65 are not in conflict with anti age discrimination requirements and expectations. (AQW 17708/11-15)

Mr Ford: In 2008 the Policing Board completed a Section 75 review of the policy which highlighted age related concerns. Cognisant of this, the Board employed the ASHE Survey which reflects the fact a police officer's career is age limited. The Policing Board applies regulation 35 (1) of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and Police Service of Northern Ireland Reserve (Injury Benefit) Regulations 2006 which allows that, once a former officer is in receipt of an award, the Policing Board must periodically review the degree of disablement.

Sexual Offences Prevention Order: Breach

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in relation to the sentencing of sex-offender John Stanfield at Antrim Crown Court, does he intend to review (i) the sentencing guidelines on cases such as this, particularly in view of the seriousness of these charges and the fact that a Sexual Offences Prevention Order was repeatedly breached and (ii) the effectiveness of Sexual Offences Prevention Orders and the way in which those bound by them are monitored. (AQW 17717/11-15)

Mr Ford: Sentencing guidelines, and their review, are a matter for the Lord Chief Justice, who has established a Sentencing Group to consider areas where sentencing guidance is needed. Guidelines have been developed for a number of serious sexual offences. Sentencing in individual cases is, of course, a matter for the courts.

Sexual offences prevention orders remain an effective tool to manage risk and protect the public from serious sexual harm from sex offenders in the community. Enforcement action is an operational matter for the police.

Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 16744/11-15 whether the best practice is consistent with the recommendations set out in the European Prison Rules at 25.4, 34.1, 71-73, 81.1-81.4 and 83 and to provide details of the training procedures for officers responsible for Supporting Prisoners At Risk, particularly officers responsible for prisoners at risk of self-harm. (AQW 17721/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Prison Officers undergo extensive induction training including training in Supporting Prisoners at Risk, Applied Suicide Intervention Skills, and practical training scenarios. This is deemed to be consistent with the recommendations set out in the European Prison Rules.

Sexual Offenders Prevention Order: Breach

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice in relation to the case of convicted sex-offender John Stanfield at Antrim Crown Court (i) what was the nature of each of the Sexual Offenders Prevention Order breaches; (ii) on what dates did they occur and; (iii) how soon after each breach were charges brought.

(AQW 17724/11-15)

Mr Ford: A person commits an offence if he does anything which he is prohibited from doing by a sexual offences prevention order. In this case the person breached a prohibition not to be in a place associated with child centred activities. The breaches took place in April and July 2011 and charges were brought in July 2011.

Supporting Prisoners at Risk

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW16049/11-15, AQW16052/11-15 and AQW 16165/11-15 to (i) clarify the date on which the Prisoner at Risk Process was first implemented at the Health Care Facility in HMP Maghaberry; (ii) of those suspended and disciplined, how many were Prison Officers and became Hospital Officers and when and where did such officer(s) receive training; and (iii) of those staff that entered the Prison Service as trained nurses, when and where did their training take place.

(AQW 17725/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Prisoner at Risk process was first implemented in 2004.
- (ii) After initial training, one main grade officer, was successful on a hospital officer board. Records do not include specific course content or location.
- (iii) Records show that training was delivered by qualified staff training officers at the Prison Service College.

Sex Offender Register

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the measures in place to reassure parents that people on the sex offenders register who move into a new geographical area are appropriately managed with regard to access to children.

(AQW 17754/11-15)

Mr Ford: The sex offender notification requirements, contained in the Sexual Offences Act 2003, require sex offenders to notify the police of any changes to their place of residence. This ensures that the police, and other agencies who seek to manage risk from sex offenders in the community, know of their whereabouts and can continue, where necessary, to apply appropriate risk management strategies.

Sex Offender Register

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Justice what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable to ensure that PSNI officers have adequate resources and tools at their disposal to ensure appropriate management of those on the sex offenders register.

(AQW 17755/11-15)

Mr Ford: I have had no specific discussion with the Chief Constable on this subject. Decisions on the deployment of police resources are an operational matter for the Chief Constable, for which he is accountable to the Policing Board.

My officials are in day to day contact with the police on matters relating to sex offender notification and the development of effective policy and legislation.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Change Team

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the ranks of people working within the Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Team.

(AQW 17774/11-15)

Mr Ford: The ranks of people working within the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) core Change Programme Team are as follows:

- 1 x Organisational Change Manager
- 1 x Governor 2
- 2 x Grade 7
- 1 x Deputy Principal
- 3 x Staff Officer
- 3 x Executive Officer 2
- 2 x Administrative Officer

In addition to the core staff listed above, the Change Programme has engaged the temporary services of a secondee from Deloitte to work on several projects in an advisory capacity, and three other Deloitte employees on a staff substitution basis, to provide specialist advice and transfer of knowledge, to help develop and embed essential skills on a range of areas within NIPS.

Eight further staff, who are based in other NIPS HQ directorates, perform important roles in supporting the Change Programme by managing and/or contributing to projects, which were implemented to deliver the Prison Review Team recommendations.

The ranks of these staff are as follows:

- 4 x Grade 7
- 1 x Deputy Principal
- 1 x Probation Officer (Seconded from PBNI)
- 1 x Executive Officer 2
- 1 x Administrative Officer

Dissident Republican Prisoners

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice what concessions have been made to dissident republican prisoners, given that their dirty protest ended suddenly.

(AQW 17783/11-15)

Mr Ford: None.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Threat Level

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice to outline the policy for advising new Prison Service recruits on the severity of the threat level, as no security information bulletins are displayed and there have been over forty notices issued to date, 12 of which have been severe.

(AQW 17784/11-15)

Mr Ford: All Prison staff are advised of any change to generic threat levels by means of a Notice to Staff. Security information notices when received are communicated to all classes by their respective lead tutors and are displayed on the appropriate Security Notice boards.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Retirement Age

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the current pay and pensions of prison officers, in light of proposals to increase the retirement age to 67 by 2015; and why prison officers are not treated in the same way as police officers, who are exempt under these new conditions.

(AQW 17785/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Prison Service Pay Review Body provides independent advice on the remuneration of prison officers.

The State pension age is increasing to reflect increases in life expectancy. On 8 March 2012, the Northern Ireland Executive agreed to commit to the policy for Career Average Revalued Earnings pension schemes with pension age linked to State Pension Age to be adopted for general use in the Northern Ireland public service schemes in line with the equivalent schemes in Great Britain. It is proposed that the reforms will have general effect in public service schemes from April 2015.

Pension matters in Northern Ireland public service schemes are a devolved matter, but in practice the Northern Ireland schemes have always operated on a principle of parity with the equivalent schemes in Great Britain. Prison Officers in Northern Ireland have pension provision made in the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme (Northern Ireland).

On 26 November 2012 the Minister of Finance and Personnel announced to the Assembly that he will introduce a Bill which will provide the core legislative framework to give effect to the reforms for the Northern Ireland schemes and include reference to the pension age of staff groups in schemes made under this Bill. The Bill will be debated in the Assembly and will be subject to full scrutiny by the Committee at which stage there will be an opportunity for any Northern Ireland specific variance from the Westminster legislation to be considered. The financial consequences of any such variances will need to be taken into account.

HMP Maghaberry: Staff Canteen

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the prison canteen at HMP Maghaberry, as vending machines are not appropriate for food and no facilities are available to accommodate prison officers

(AQW 17809/11-15)

Mr Ford: This matter is currently under review and options are being considered.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice for an update on Bangor Courthouse and any future potential disposal.
(AQW 17952/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the member to my answer to AQW/17482/11-15 on 7 December 2012. There is no further update at this time.

Bullying and Public Disorder: Mobile Phone Usage

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department plans to restrict access to mobile phone usage for those who use the devices for the purposes of bullying or public disorder.
(AQW 17965/11-15)

Mr Ford: Courts already have powers to impose restrictions on the use of mobile phones, for example by way of bail conditions or community orders. In addition, a range of statutory provisions already exists to tackle harassment and public disorder.

Harassment or bullying can already be prosecuted under the Protection from Harassment (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. The Communications Act 2003 also makes it an offence to send by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an indecent, obscene or menacing character.

A range of offences also exists under common law and under the Public Order (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 including, for example, stirring up hatred, arousing fear, and riotous or disorderly behaviour in a public place. Conspiracy to commit any such offences is also punishable under current legislation.

I have no plans at this stage to expand these powers any further but will keep the matter under review.

Department for Regional Development

Legal Cases

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Regional Development how many legal cases involving his Department, or its arm's-length bodies, which have appeared before courts or are pending hearing, have had mediation offered by the other party but declined by the Department or agency.
(AQW 17160/11-15)

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Since April 2010, there has been one case involving my Department and its Arm's Length Bodies where mediation was offered by the other party but was declined. The case was subsequently resolved.

Opportunities for mediation may arise more than once at different points in cases. This answer therefore covers only resolved cases.

Footbridge and Subway Projects

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail all (i) footbridge and (ii) subway projects that have been (a) announced or (b) constructed in each of the last five years.
(AQW 17541/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of footbridge and subway projects, constructed in each of the last five years, are provided in the table below:

Scheme	Year Constructed
Fisher's Lane Footbridge, Comber	2008
Ballystockart Footbridge, Comber	2008
Swatragh Footbridge	2009
City Hospital & Lisburn Station Footbridge modifications	2009
Balinderry Footbridge	2010
Pedestrian Underpass, Carbane, Newry	2010
Newry Station Park and Ride Footbridge	2010
Broadbridge Footbridge	2011
Campsey Underpass	2011
Fisherman's Walkway Footbridge	2011

Scheme	Year Constructed
Pedestrian Underpass lengthened at Madams Bank Road, Londonderry	2012
Irishtown Footbridge, Omagh	2012
Ballyrainey Footbridge, Comber	2012
Creggan Footbridge, Newry	2012
New Footbridge at Ballymoney Station	2012
New Footbridge at Titanic Quarter, Belfast	2012
Footbridge cladding at Lurgan Station	2012
Subway at Maghera Park and Ride	2012
New Footbridge at Portadown Station	2013

In relation to the schemes listed above, I should advise that the Broadbridge Footbridge, Campsey Underpass and Fisherman's Walkway Footbridge were constructed as part of the A2 Maydown to City of Derry Airport Dualling Scheme, which was completed in February 2011.

With regard to footbridge and subway projects announced in each of the last five years, details are provided in the table below:

Scheme	Scheme Status
Footbridge in Strabane Town Centre	Announced in 2008
Footbridge at Straw, near Draperstown	Announced in 2010
New Footbridge at Moira Station	Planned for 2013/14
Ballymena Subway strengthening	Planned for 2014/15

I should also advise that the A6 Randalstown to Castledawson Dual Carriageway and A6 Londonderry to Dungiven Dualling Schemes include provision for one and two pedestrian footbridges respectively, and discussions are ongoing in relation to a proposed Footbridge at Mountain Road, Kilkeel.

Road Safety: Gransha Road Roundabout, Bangor

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail any surveys that have been carried out to assess the road safety implications of an additional 850 school children crossing the road near the Gransha Road roundabout, Bangor. (AQW 17542/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: During the planning process for the new school, Roads Service requested the developer to carry out a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) to show the likely impact the development would have on the public road network, and to identify those measures necessary to mitigate any adverse consequences. The TIA took into account that there had previously been a school at this location. While some improvements to the road environment have subsequently been made, the TIA did not identify a need to provide enhanced pedestrian facilities in the vicinity of the roundabout.

Roads Service is aware of public concern relating to this issue and it intends to monitor pedestrian movements in the area whenever the school opens. This will enable Roads Service to assess both the level of demand for a crossing and the predominant route taken by pedestrians, so any potential future provision may be located to best accommodate local pedestrian movements.

Translink: Fuel Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the fuel costs for Translink in each of the last three year. (AQW 17568/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink has provided the following table which outlines their fuel running costs for the last three years:

Company	2009/10 £'000	2010/11 £'000	2011/12 £'000
Ulsterbus	23,067	20,019	20,759
Metro	7,725	6,903	6,967
NI Railways	7,623	5,874	6,722
Total*	38,415	32,796	34,448

Northern Ireland Railways: Fuel Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the fuel costs of running NI Railway trains in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17571/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer you to the full answer provided to AQW/17568 which contains this information.

Bus Lane: Sprucefield to Belfast

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the rationale for not introducing a continuous bus lane from Sprucefield to Belfast to assist those commuting each morning from areas such as South Down.

(AQW 17606/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the Busway on the M1 was provided in August 2006, initially as a temporary measure, for the duration of the M1/Westlink Improvement Scheme. The starting position, at Ballyskeagh Bridge, was chosen as this allowed the buses to bypass traffic queuing back from the Blacks Road junction during the associated roadworks.

Officials advise that "Automatic Incident Detection" cameras have been provided over the entire length of the Busway, at approximately 200 metre intervals, to ensure any vehicle stopping on the hard shoulder is detected. Action can then be taken to close the Busway, until the incident is cleared. To extend this system would require considerable investment.

Whilst I appreciate there is localised congestion associated with the on-slips at the Saintfield Road and Sprucefield Junctions, there are currently no plans to extend the length of this Busway.

Roads Service: North Down Depot

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development how many staff work at the North Down roads depot.

(AQW 17608/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the Member that 33 staff work in the Roads Service North Down depot, 11 in the local North Down Section Office and 22 for Roads Service's internal contractor, Roads Service Direct.

Translink: TaxSmart Scheme

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development whether he has any plans to extend the Translink TaxSmart Card scheme beyond the Greater Belfast region.

(AQW 17629/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I can advise the member that currently the Translink Tax Smart Card Scheme is available to bus passengers across the whole of Northern Ireland provided it is compliant with HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) rules, which allows Translink to issue Tax Smart Cards but only for journeys undertaken by a bus service which stops at least every 15 miles. We can and do raise these rules with HMRC where difficulties arise but the decision ultimately rests with HMRC.

Court Case: Cost Liability

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the risks to cost liability to his Department arising from the current A5 court case and what discussions has he had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel on meeting such costs from his budget.

(AQW 17646/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: As the Member is aware, a legal challenge to my decision to proceed with the A5 dual carriageway project was lodged in the High Court on 10 September 2012. My Department will robustly defend this action and has accordingly instructed Senior Counsel.

Following a preliminary hearing on 29 November 2012, the Judge has ruled on the application for a Protective Costs Order by the Alternative A5 Alliance (AA5A). The ruling means that should the AA5A be unsuccessful in their challenge, their liability for my Department's legal costs would be capped at £20,000. If the AA5A is successful, all of their legal costs will be met by my Department.

An injunction hearing in relation to preliminary works is scheduled for the 17 December 2012, with the full hearing to deal with the substantive legal challenge set for 12, 13 and 14 February 2013.

The financial risk associated with cost liability of the legal proceedings is considered modest when compared to the overall cost of the scheme, or the cost of delays.

My officials are attempting to mitigate costs associated with delays to the scheme, which was planned to commence in mid-October. They are also liaising with their counterparts in DFP in managing the financial implications of the legal action. I have made the Finance Minister and the Executive aware of the key issues arising from this legal action.

Winter Weather: Preparation

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline the plans in place to ensure that the Roads Service is fully prepared to deal with the potential severe winter weather conditions.

(AQW 17687/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has assured me that it is well prepared for potential winter weather conditions and will aim to provide a high standard of service delivery for the gritting of roads during the current winter season.

Officials have further advised that, prior to the start of this winter service season, Roads Service carried out a significant amount of planning to ensure a state of readiness. In addition to a number of routine pre-season checks, planning included ensuring that adequate staffing arrangements were in place, including training for new staff where required, and checking that all winter service equipment was in working order.

Every night, since the end of October 2012 and until the middle of April 2013, Roads Service has over 300 people on standby ready to salt main roads, helping drivers across Northern Ireland cope with the wintry conditions.

Prior to the commencement of the current winter season, all Roads Service salt barns were filled to capacity ahead of the current winter season with stocks in excess of 75,000 tonnes. Additional salt stocks totalling a further 38,100 tonnes are held at six strategic locations to provide additional resilience. The current Winter Service salt contract also provides for the supply of a further 15,000 tonnes per month until the end of April 2013, if required.

In addition, salt bins or grit piles have been provided for use by the public, on other routes adopted or maintained by Roads Service, which do not qualify for inclusion on the gritting schedule. Roads Service currently provides approximately 4,800 salt bins and almost 50,000 grit piles on public roads.

Salt Bins and Grit Piles on Public Roads

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department plans to increase the number of salt bins and grit piles on public roads.

(AQW 17688/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service provides salt bins, in urban areas, and grit piles, in rural areas, for use by the public on a self help basis on roads which do not qualify for inclusion in the salting schedule, and where the following criteria are met:

- the location in question is on the publicly maintained road network;
- the gradient on the road in question exceeds 5%;
- no reasonable alternative route is available; and
- the subject road qualifies through an assessment process that considers factors such as road geometry, residential usage, community welfare and commercial usage.

There are no limits placed on the number of salt bins or grit piles which may be provided. However, these will not normally be provided within 100 metres of an existing salt bin / grit pile.

There are currently approximately 4,800 salt bins and almost 50,000 grit piles on public roads across Northern Ireland. Roads Service will consider the provision of additional salt bins or grit piles, if requested by a member of the public and a suitable location is available. I can advise the Member that under this current policy, the number of salt boxes has increased by over 30% during the last three years.

Road Improvement: Craigantlet

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the Craigantlet Road scheme proposals, **(AQW 17728/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that a number of alternative options for a road improvement scheme in Craigantlet were put forward by residents. These options are currently being assessed by consultants, and this work should be completed by the end of January 2013.

I can assure the Member that no decisions will be taken before the outcome of this study is known.

Flooding

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what action is being taken by Roads Service to combat the risk of flooding.

(AQW 17733/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Responsibility for drainage infrastructure is shared between my Department's Roads Service, NI Water, and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Rivers Agency. Together, the three agencies have formulated procedures for liaison and co-ordination of the emergency planning and response to flooding, resulting in the production of Best Practice Guidelines and flooding hotspots lists.

The combined flooding hotspots register is a list of key flooding locations across Northern Ireland and identifies, for each location, the agency which should take the lead during a flooding event. The hotspots list is continually updated as new locations are reported, or problem locations rectified. However, the flooding problems at these locations are not always easy to resolve, as remedial work may be prohibitively expensive, or the solution may not be immediately obvious and may require further investigation or consultation with other Departments or adjacent landowners.

In addition to the hotspots register, each Roads Service Section Office also identifies locations which are regularly affected by flooding in their respective areas. Programmes of work are prepared by each office to undertake remedial measures at the areas identified, on a prioritised basis.

In the medium to long term, it is the intention of the three drainage agencies to implement the European Directive on the Assessment and Management of Flood Risks (2007/60/EC). This ordinance, known as the Floods Directive, came into force on 26 November 2007 and became law in Northern Ireland on 25 November 2009. The Floods Directive is designed to help Member States establish a framework for managing flood risk that is aimed at reducing the adverse consequences of flooding on human health, the environment, cultural heritage, and economic activity.

At an operational level, to help combat the risk of flooding, Roads Service inspects, and cleans where necessary, all gullies in urban areas twice each year and gullies in rural areas once each year. This policy ensures that a reasonable level of maintenance is carried out to drainage systems, taking account of the Department's finite funding and staff resource levels.

In addition, and in accordance with Roads Service's Road Maintenance Standards for Safety, all public roads are inspected on a one, two or four monthly cycle, depending on the type of road. During these inspections, any defects identified with the road drainage system will be dealt with in accordance with the afore-mentioned Standards.

Free Off-peak Travel: Under 25s

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Regional Development for his assessment of the cost of offering free off-peak travel to under 25s.

(AQW 17756/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have not made any assessment of the cost of offering free off-peak travel to children and young people under the age of 25.

It is difficult to estimate accurately the likely cost of such a benefit. Numerous assumptions would have to be made regarding the number of people under the age of 25 who would use public transport during off-peak periods, the frequency and current fare costs of their travel and any extra costs to Translink in order to accommodate this travel within existing services. Therefore, forecasts of the associated costs would not be robust.

Currently, children under age 5 travel free on Translink services and children from 5 to the age for compulsory schooling are eligible for a half-fare concession. By using a y-link smartcard, young people from age 16 until their 24th birthday can get a fare discount of at least one third on Translink services.

Given the current pressures on my budget, I have no plans to extend the Concessionary Fares Scheme.

Lennon v Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development pursuant to AQW 17157/11-15, given that the finding was against the Department and the then Minister, why the Department cannot apologise to Dr Alan Lennon.

(AQW 17758/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have nothing further to add to the response I gave to AQW 17157/11-15 on 6 December.

Parking Charges: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail what plans his Department has to introduce car parking charges in North Down in car parks that are currently free to use.

(AQW 17790/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Executive's economy and jobs initiative announced on 7 November 2012 provides confirmation that there will be no introduction of charges to free car parks or any further increase to charges in charged car parks in North Down during the remainder of the current budget period; that is, until the end of March 2015.

NI Water: Contracts with Huber

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the total value of contracts placed by NI Water with Huber in the last ten years; (ii) the tendering process used and; (iii) what steps have been taken to encourage Northern Ireland based companies to tender for the type of equipment supplied by Huber.

(AQW 17827/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) the total value of contracts it placed with Huber in the last 10 years and (ii) the tendering process used, is as detailed in the table below.

Contract name	Tendering process	Period	Total Value of Contract/ Spend
Multiple quotations	Quotations	January 2003 to August 2010	£1.7 million (Expenditure)
C466 - Contract for the supply of a range of proprietary screens, related parts & associated maintenance	Award of a contract without a competition as per Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) 17(1)(c)	6 August 2010 to 5 August 2011	£230,000 (Contract Value)
C535 - Contract for the supply of a range of proprietary screens, related parts & associated maintenance	Award of a contract without a competition as per Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) 17(1)(c)	7 October 2011 to 31 December 2012	£500,000 (Contract Value)
C555 - Screens Framework Contract	Publicly advertised tender via Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) Open procedure	Currently in standstill period. Planned contract period 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2016 with option to extend to 31 December 2019.	Forecast value of expenditure with Huber is circa £100,000 per annum.

- (iii) NIW recently publicly advertised an open tender competition, C555 – Screens Framework Contract, to the market which included Huber equipment and other similar equipment. The tender competition was advertised via the Official Journal of the European Union, NIW's website and published as an opportunity through eSourcingNI. Huber Technologies Ltd of Portadown was the only company which provided a bid for the supply and associated maintenance of Huber equipment.

NI Water: Contracts

Mr Dallat asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail (i) the value of contracts for equipment placed with local suppliers over the last five years; and (ii) the monitoring process in place to ensure that local companies are informed of the opportunities that exist within NI Water.

(AQW 17828/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that (i) over the last 5 years, it has awarded contracts to local suppliers or local branches of national companies with a value in the region of £28.5 million. This figure includes the value of all contracts predominantly comprising equipment purchases which were awarded by NIW between 30 November 2007 and 12 December 2012.

- (ii) Over the last 5 years, the above contracts have been advertised via eSourcingNI or a predecessor portal and also published on NIW's website. eSourcingNI is the Northern Ireland Civil Service portal used to advertise tender opportunities. Any tender above the threshold for advertising required by the Utilities Contracts Regulations 2006 (as amended) has been subject to a Contract Notice published through the Official Journal of the European Union. In March 2012, NIW published on its website a list of all tender opportunities it expected to advertise over the subsequent eighteen months. It also invited local companies to attend a "meet the buyer" event in March 2012 to inform local companies of forthcoming opportunities and to provide advice on how to tender to the public sector in general and to NIW in particular. NIW intends to continue this practice and will also attend "meet the buyer" events organised by other bodies to provide lists of forthcoming opportunities to companies.

By way of further information, the procurement strategy used by NIW for its capital construction programme is such that it enters into a contract with a principal contractor (this is predominately a locally based civil engineering contractor or joint venture partnership) and does not contract directly with equipment suppliers.

Consequently, there is no mechanism for monitoring the placing of equipment orders by the principal contractor and the value of such orders or sub-contracts. Nonetheless, well in excess of 90% of NIW construction contracts are awarded to locally based Small and Medium Enterprises and the associated equipment orders are likely to be placed with local suppliers.

Hollywood Coastal Path: Lighting

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development whether his Department will consider providing lighting for the Hollywood coastal path,

(AQW 17839/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised me that responsibility for this path, including the provision of lighting, lies with North Down Borough Council, whose officials should be able to deal directly with your request.

Buses: Spending

Mr McNarry asked the Minister for Regional Development to explain the rationale behind a spend of £3.7 million for 6 single decker buses and whether the 6 buses to be replaced have a trade-in value.

(AQW 17858/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Firstly I would clarify that the spend of £3.7m referred to not only relates to six single deck buses but also to 13 Goldline coaches.

Translink advise that the rationale behind buying buses is to replace older buses which will help towards the Regional Transportation Strategy aim of maintaining an average fleet age of no more than 8 years old.

Bus procurement processes do not include trade-ins against the purchase of new vehicles; however if applicable, Translink does dispose of redundant vehicles in a way that delivers best value for money.

Ministerial Private Office: Running Costs

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the cost of running his Ministerial Private Office in the last financial year.

(AQW 17868/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The costs of running my Private Office for the full financial year 2011/12 were £398,990. I took up my appointment as Minister for Regional Development on 17 May 2011 but it is not possible to provide a precise figure from this date.

Roads Maintenance

Mr McDevitt asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of expenditure on roads maintenance in each council area for each year since 2009.

(AQW 17873/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The attached table sets out, for each of the last 3 financial years, details of expenditure incurred on roads maintenance by my Department's Roads Service by District Council area. The categories listed in the table are defined as follows:

- Structural Maintenance includes resurfacing, surface dressing, patching and structural drainage;
- Routine Maintenance includes grass cutting, weed control verge maintenance and gully emptying etc.; and
- Other Maintenance includes expenditure on highway structures, winter maintenance and traffic maintenance.

District Council Area	Year								
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
	Structural Maintenance £k			Routine Maintenance £k			Other Maintenance £k		
Antrim	2,794	2,463	3,470	545	515	752	531	688	595
Coleraine	2,736	2,373	3,617	544	421	897	933	745	543
Limavady	2,344	2,303	3,431	466	558	618	522	629	408
Moyle	1,397	945	1,891	398	182	312	179	231	194
Ballymoney	2,002	2,029	2,758	257	502	264	489	544	299
Derry	3,086	2,887	5,560	933	688	1,010	990	1,047	818
Ballymena	3,339	3,097	4,463	773	648	884	905	1,178	1,021
Larne	1,704	1,380	1,756	514	427	627	564	657	289
Belfast	6,039	5,527	9,054	2,712	2,895	2,169	3,813	3,674	3,436
Castlereagh	1,792	1,218	1,433	462	386	478	239	499	385
Newtownabbey	2,455	2,339	3,029	569	418	513	370	350	406
Carrickfergus	1,036	778	1,805	199	95	306	134	193	254
North Down	1,755	1,938	2,667	356	588	324	655	388	318
Lisburn	4,604	5,411	5,297	832	665	908	803	1,051	902
Ards	3,065	4,088	4,783	626	613	863	378	452	275
Armagh	5,388	5,229	8,197	719	634	1,051	886	1,141	671

District Council Area	Year								
	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
	Structural Maintenance £k			Routine Maintenance £k			Other Maintenance £k		
Newry & Mourne	5,605	5,382	6,768	800	864	912	953	1,035	749
Banbridge	2,811	3,572	4,212	569	354	650	599	1,036	373
Craigavon	3,867	4,809	5,417	632	532	657	826	815	703
Down	3,377	4,065	5,324	592	243	743	750	566	499
Magherafelt	2,885	3,186	3,515	332	602	321	535	805	286
Omagh	4,923	4,262	6,143	1,198	363	851	1,376	772	802
Strabane	4,592	4,366	5,196	712	807	591	614	805	518
Cookstown	2,145	2,718	3,887	277	322	367	480	360	269
Fermanagh	4,951	6,869	9,869	686	320	789	573	859	604
Dungannon	4,498	5,078	6,895	586	750	638	854	1,242	542
Totals	85,190	88,312	120,437	17,289	15,392	18,491	19,949	21,762	16,159

Lennon v Department for Regional Development

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 17209/11-15, whether the Department investigated whether any member of staff was responsible for facilitating access by Conor Murphy to the privileged legal advice and, if so, what was the outcome of the investigation.

(AQW 17885/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My legal advice and the reasons for my decision not to appeal this case were shared with other Executive Ministers. In making my legal advice available I advised that this carried a legal professional privilege restriction and should not be distributed more widely. I have no reason to believe that there was any further distribution of my legal advice by my Departmental Officials.

Bus Fares

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if he is aware of any future plans by Translink to increase bus fares. (AQW 17899/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Each year, Translink produces a three-year corporate plan which is discussed with my Department and has to focus on the year ahead. My role and that of my officials, is to consider the Translink Corporate Plan.

Discussions begin at official level a number of months before the start of the financial year and are due to commence shortly. Prior to approving any overall fare increase I also take into account the views of key stake holders.

I recognise that the funding position for Translink in 2013-14 and 2014-15 is constrained. I expect Translink to draw up plans which take account of their legal obligations under the Transport Act (Northern Ireland) 1967 and the Companies Act 2006 to consider going-concern issues and to break even year on year. This could potentially impact on all Public Transport fares.

It is important to recognise that any planned reviews of budgets or future in-year monitoring rounds could also impact here.

Department for Social Development

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Sick Leave

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development what are the current levels of sick leave among staff in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive; and what is the trend of sickness absence since 2007.

(AQW 17459/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The current level of sickness absence amongst staff in the Housing Executive, as at the end of September 2012, is 5.9 days.

The trend of sickness absence since 2007 is as follows:

- 2007/08 14.7 days
- 2008/09 13.2 days

- 2009/10 13.4 days
- 2010/11 12.2 days
- 2011/12 11.1 days

Northern Ireland Housing Executive: Red Sky

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development how procurement and associated arrangements have changed within the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in light of the Red Sky controversy.

(AQW 17461/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive has employed new methodologies for taking procurement forward and managing contracts. These new arrangements have been developed and put in place following reviews of Housing Executive processes and from recommendations made by the Gateway Review carried out in 2010. The actions from the Gateway Review and the internal Housing Executive procedural review included the following:

- Review the form of contract used in contracts.
- Ensure that each contract has a designated contract (commercial) manager.
- The KPIs used within contracts should be reviewed and enhanced.
- An internal oversight body should be created to oversee all major procurements.
- All major procurements are now taken forward following a project management methodology.
- Creation of a new Corporate Procurement Strategy.

These actions have all been included within new procurement and contract management procedures.

Atos: Lupus

Mr McGlone asked the Minister for Social Development what training in understanding the condition Lupus is provided to ATOS medical staff who carry out examinations on benefit claimants.

(AQW 17518/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Whilst Atos Healthcare Professionals are not required to have a specialist qualification in the area of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus, as part of the comprehensive training programme provided to every Healthcare Professional, a specific self directed training programme is provided on this condition. Healthcare Professionals have access to evidence based information, including the description, diagnosis and the main disabling effects of the condition. Each Healthcare Professional must provide evidence as part of their training evaluation that this Systemic Lupus Erythematosus training has been completed to a satisfactory standard.

Welfare Reform

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department is taking to assess further the impact that the proposed Welfare Reform legislation will have on people.

(AQW 17586/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department completed an equality impact assessment which was published in May 2012, and committed to continue to look at the possible equality impacts as the Bill moves forward. Officials are currently reviewing additional data recently received from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). This data from HMRC, in conjunction with the data from the existing DWP Policy Simulation Model will greatly improve the information available and our ability to identify potential adverse impacts. It is our intention to update the EQIA as soon as the analysis is completed.

The Policy Simulation Model (PSM) is used for poverty and scenario analysis and produces outputs including the financial impacts on different demographic groups from policy changes to the tax and benefits system. It is based on the results of the Family Resources Survey. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have used the PSM for many years but work has recently commenced to expand the model to include Northern Ireland. Analytical Services Unit continue to carry out various research projects developing a Northern Ireland version of the PSM to support the various work strands within the Universal Credit Programme. The PSM is a micro simulation model. It takes a snapshot of the NI population (using Family Resource Survey (FRS) annual data) and models individuals from the FRS both on a benefit unit level and a household level. The model recreates the rules of the Tax and Benefit system and allows users to make adjustments to these rules in order to simulate the introduction of new policies. The effect of changes on benefit income and net income can then be measured allowing impact analysis of the policy. The model uses grossing to scale to the NI population projections produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. The PSM is entitlement based, and hence models eligibility to various benefits and assumes 100% take-up. However, the option does exist to adjust the PSM datasets based on varying levels of estimated take-up.

The Department has also met with the Equality Commission since the production of the equality impact assessment. The Commission has recognised the data deficits, but also endorsed the approach that the Department has taken in reviewing the equality impact assessment and in equality screening the regulations as they are prepared.

The Department is currently working with the Ad Hoc Committee on Conformity with Equality and Human Rights Requirements to address any concerns which may be raised.

I also established the Executive subcommittee on welfare reform which is considering areas where some mitigation may be considered necessary. As a result of this and the ongoing meetings with Lord Freud, I have secured flexibilities in relation to payments of Universal Credit and I advised the Assembly of these in my statement on 22 October 2012. Discussions with Lord Freud are continuing in relation to the proposed changes to support with housing costs.

Window Replacement Schemes: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what replacement window schemes are scheduled for North Down in each of the next three years.

(AQW 17597/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive currently has a number of planned schemes on site within North Down, all of which involve window replacement. The latest position with regard to these schemes is:

- Lisnabreen & Clanmorris scheme commenced on site 27 August 2012
- Rathgill/Kilcooley/Loughview commenced on site 15 October 2012
- Whitehill scheme commenced on site 19 November 2012

The Housing Executive considers that, through its programme of planned improvement schemes, the majority of its dwellings in the North Down Borough requiring the replacement of existing windows with double glazed units has been addressed.

A small number of dwellings not included in the above schemes will be addressed through a district "mop up" exercise which is scheduled to commence during 2013/14 financial year. The tenants affected by these proposed works will be advised when an on site date has been confirmed.

Belfast Regeneration Office: Sites Acquired

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16560/11-15, (i) how much has been spent to date on acquisition and upkeep of all the sites acquired by the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO); (ii) to list all the sites that have been acquired since the inception of BRO; and (iii) how each site has been developed.

(AQW 17607/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Since its inception in 1999, the Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) has spent £20m on the acquisition of sites. Since April 2002, BRO has spent £5.2m on associated capital works and maintenance of these sites, no maintenance costs records held prior to April 2002.

Details of the sites and any related development can be found at Annex A.

ANNEX A

Sites Acquired	Development
Woodvale Campus Site	In DSD ownership
2 Connswater Street	In DSD ownership
Land at Ballarat Street	In DSD ownership
Land at Denmark Street (1)	In DSD ownership
12-14 Castlereagh Street	In DSD ownership
Land at St. Mary's Gdns (Mica Drive)	In DSD ownership
Land at Denmark Street (2)	In DSD ownership
3 Stormount Lane	In DSD ownership
Shankill Youth Club (Craven St)	In DSD ownership
Land to rear of 141 Shankill Rd	In DSD ownership
Alliance Crescent	In DSD ownership
North Howard link	Industrial & Business Centre
42-48 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
98/98A Templemore Avenue	In DSD ownership
20-24 Castlereagh Street	In DSD ownership
141 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
20 Oldpark Road	In DSD ownership
36-38 Oldpark Road	In DSD ownership

Sites Acquired	Development
28 Duncairn Gardens	In DSD ownership
35-55 Carr's Glen Park	In DSD ownership
44-50 Carr's Glen Park	In DSD ownership
364 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
Land at Northumberland Street	Community Garden
143-145 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
Land at Molkte Street	Community Garden
1a Stormount Lane	In DSD ownership
970-976 Shore Road	In DSD ownership
16-18 Castlereagh Street	In DSD ownership
Sites A & B Springfield Rd	In DSD ownership
Sites C & D Springfield Rd	In DSD ownership
Land at 188-194 North Queen Street	Private Residential Development
184 North Queen Street	In DSD ownership
118-120 Antrim Road	In DSD ownership
275 Albertbridge Road	In DSD ownership
277 Albertbidge Road	In DSD ownership
17-21 Battenberg Street	In DSD ownership
Former Nicholl Engineering Factory	In DSD ownership
102 Mayo Street	In DSD ownership
Lawnbrook Play Area	Private Residential Development
2-6 Bellevue St & 1A Sugarfield St	In DSD ownership
93-107 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
178-180 Shankill Road	Community Based Health Project
30-34 Oldpark Road	In DSD ownership
232 Newtownards Road	In DSD ownership
20-32 Ormeau Road	In DSD ownership
142 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
72-74 Shore Road & 2-4 Mill Road	Commercial Use
294-296 Crumlin Road	In DSD ownership
15-15a Greenland Street	In DSD ownership
286 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
288 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
290 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
292 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
294 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
378 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
380 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
382 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
384 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
386 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership

Sites Acquired	Development
Land at Little King Street	Private Residential Development
Land at Bellevue Street	In DSD ownership
8 Castlereagh Street	In DSD ownership
50-58 York Road	Temporary Statutory Accommodation
Land at Carr's Glen Park	In DSD ownership
Land at Middlepath Street	City East Enterprise Park
188-194 North Queen Street (North Star Bar)	Private Residential Development
10 York Road	In DSD ownership
2-6 Castlereagh St & 139-141 Albertbridge Rd	In DSD ownership
60 Clandeboye Street	In DSD ownership
130-138 Castlereagh St & 62-64 Clandeboye St	In DSD ownership
Land at Ballysillan Park	In DSD ownership
278-282 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
140 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
144 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
146 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
150 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
374A Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
Land at Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
519 Falls Road	In DSD ownership
148 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
12 York Road	In DSD ownership
22-28 & 40 Old Park Road	In DSD ownership
42-44 Old Park Road	In DSD ownership
Armagh House	In DSD ownership
Ravenhill Reach	In DSD ownership
174 North Queen Street	Private Residential Development (not complete)
Former Disabled Care Centre	Enterprise Centre & Social Residential Development
Templemore Avenue College	Community Networking Centre
357-361 Donegall Road	Private Residential Development (not complete)
301-303 Donegall Road	Community Socio-Economic Enterprise
10 Castlereagh Street	In DSD ownership
72 Newtownards Road (Kwik Fit)	City East Enterprise Park
25 Rydalmere Street	In DSD ownership
124-130 Sandy Row & 39-49 Albion St	Social Residential Development
211-217 Beersbridge Road	In DSD ownership
155-157 Newtownards Road	In DSD ownership
2A Adam Street Gospel Hall	In DSD ownership
183-191 Beersbridge Road	In DSD ownership
312 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
310 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership

Sites Acquired	Development
308 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
Land at Ship St	Commercial Development
88-136 Lawnbrook Avenue	Private Residential Development
140-148 Shankill Road	Social Residential Development
North Queen Street	Community Play Park
73-73a Woodvale Rd	Retail & Private Residential Development
North Howard Link	Industrial & Business Centre
124-138 Peters Hill	In DSD ownership
164/186 Duncairn Gardens	Retail & Private Residential Development
Forth Parade	Private Residential Development
Bellevue St/Mountjoy St	In DSD ownership
Northumberland Link	Industrial & Business Centre
181 Duncairn Gardens	In DSD ownership
Lands at Manor St (1)	Community Centre
Ainsworth Ave/Mayo St	Private Residential Development
406 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
410-412 Shankill Road	In DSD ownership
Lands at Manor St (2)	Community Centre

Housing Executive: Asbestos Surveying

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the process utilised by his Department to appoint seven of the ten companies who had met the criteria to provide asbestos surveying services to the Housing Executive (AQW 17612/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive took forward the Procurement for the Asbestos Surveying Framework using Regulation 16 of the Public Contracts Regulations 2006 (amended). This procedure is a restricted procedure and comprises a two stage process involving the pre-qualification of applicants before commencing the tender process.

There were 11 companies which qualified for the tender stage of the procurement process. The tender stage was evaluated against a combination of quality and cost criteria. The quality criteria were weighted at 100 marks and the cost criteria weighted at 900 marks. The quality evaluation was carried out by evaluating submissions against specific criteria of Service Delivery and Customer Care and Payment & Quality Assurance. At the quality submission evaluation, one of the tenderers was rejected having not met the quality scoring threshold. That tenderer was eliminated from the competition and its Province Wide Pricing Submission was not opened or evaluated.

Following the evaluation of the quality submissions, the pricing submission was opened for only those tenderers passing the quality thresholds. The tenderer who submitted the lowest acceptable price was allocated the full 900 marks available. Each of the other Tenderers was evaluated in relation to the lowest price. Higher priced tenders were awarded proportional scores relative to the lowest priced submission. This gave the prices score, which if necessary was rounded to two decimal figures.

The scores for Quality and Price were then added together and each score was then ranked from one through to 10. The rules of the procurement made it clear that the top seven ranked tenderers would be appointed to the framework. The process for appointing the top ranking seven tenderers to the framework involves the issuing of the Letters of Intent and entering into a standstill period of 10 days. Once the standstill period is complete the Housing Executive will commence the secondary competition to award contracts for each of the five lots.

The process is still live and contracts will not be awarded before 18 December 2012.

Benefit Fraud

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have been reported for Social Security benefit fraud sanctions in each of the last three years; and how many of these people have had sanctions applied. (AQW 17614/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information requested is set out in the tables below.

Table 1

	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012
Number of reports of potential benefit fraud received	8,595	11,108	11,177

Table 21

Sanctions	982	1128	1025
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1. The Table of Sanctions includes cases where a sanction was imposed where a cheque was falsely reported as having been lost and subsequently discovered to have been cashed. Details of cheque losses reported are not included in Table 1.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority

Employment and Support Allowance: Assessments

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many people, who had previously been assessed as eligible for incapacity benefit or Employment and Support Allowance, have had zero points applied under the Atos assessment; and how many people have lost their entitlement to incapacity benefit or Employment Support Allowance in each of the last three years.

(AQW 17615/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Atos Healthcare were appointed to deliver Medical Support Services on behalf of the Department in June 2011.

During the period June 2011 and October 2012, 13,740 claimants who had previously been assessed as eligible for Incapacity Benefit or Employment and Support Allowance scored zero points at a Work Capability Assessment medical examination. This represents 16% of the 84,024 Work Capability Assessment medical examinations conducted during the period June 2011 and October 2012.

The table below provides a breakdown of claims where entitlement to Employment and Support Allowance or Incapacity Benefit has ceased in each of the last three complete years. This includes cases where a claimant has been found fit for work, has failed to attend a medical assessment or has not provided the required information. The figures also include claims where entitlement has ceased following changes in a claimant's circumstances including when a claimant returns to work, claims an alternative benefit or the death of a claimant.

Year	Employment and Support Allowance	Incapacity Benefit
2009-10	12,827	15,408
2010-11	17,672	8,837
2011-12	19,347	7,636

Social Housing

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how objective need is applied to the outworkings of the social housing development programme.

(AQW 17621/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive carries out an annual assessment of social housing need for each local housing area throughout Northern Ireland. This incorporates an assessment of numbers in housing stress, projected allocations of existing stock and additional factors such as: vacant stock, demographic trends, regeneration issues and local market intelligence. This provides a five year social housing need requirement for all local housing areas across Northern Ireland.

The detail of these projections is published on an annual basis by District Council Area, in the Housing Executive's District Housing Plans and is available on the Housing Executive's website.

Alongside these assessments, the Housing Executive has developed Strategic Guidelines which direct development of the Social Housing Development Programme. The Strategic Guidelines, which are reviewed on an annual basis, allocate the social housing programme across four strategic groupings - urban need, rural need, supported housing and Travellers accommodation.

Targets for each of these four groups are assessed at a regional and local level and take into account a range of supporting research. They are then used to allocate programme share geographically using an evidence based approach, which takes cognisance of the most up to date social housing waiting list statistics and associated policy issues.

Atos: Assessments

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to explain the differences between the assessments applied by ATOS locally and the assessments in Britain.

(AQW 17625/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no differences between the work capability assessments carried out by Atos for the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain and the Social Security Agency in Northern Ireland. The work capability assessments are based on a range of descriptors laid down in the legislation which governs the operation of the accounts in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Welfare Reform: ICT Programme

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16670/11-15, for an estimate of the cost of the work; and to detail the timeline for the design, build and test of the software.

(AQW 17660/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Officials within the Universal Credit Programme in my Department are continuing to work with the Department for Work and Pensions to determine the costs associated with development of the software. This is based on the current assumption that Northern Ireland will not pay any of the national build costs for the generic system rather that our costs will be restricted to development costs in relation to standard Northern Ireland differences (e.g. different bank holidays) and any IT development work in relation to the payment flexibilities. It is not expected that stable cost estimates will be available until detailed design work has taken place and suppliers have provided costed solution proposals.

Detailed plans for UC Release 3 (April 2014 release) which will include Northern Ireland requirements are not yet available. However the high-level timeline for the design, build and test phases is anticipated to be as follows:

- Release 3 Scope Defined – January 2013
- Release 3 High Level Design Completed – March 2013
- Release 3 Detailed Design Completed – September 2013
- Release 3 Build and Test – March 2014
- Release 3 Implementation – April 2014

Charities: Pensions

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Social Development whether he is aware of any issues regarding pensions for charities; and what responsibilities his Department has on this issue.

(AQW 17661/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has previously been made aware of issues facing local charities who are part of the NI Charities Pension Scheme (NICPS), administered by The Pensions Trust. The Trust has reported a significant pension deficit for the NICPS. This position is not unique to the NICPS, it is widely reported that many pension schemes across the UK currently face substantial deficits with investments not performing as well as expected.

In terms of the NICPS, the deficit in the scheme is primarily a matter for the Pensions Trust, as administrator of the scheme, and for local charities as employers and members of that scheme. Government does not have any role in meeting pension deficit costs.

Issues relating to charity pension liabilities have also been raised with the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI). CCNI has discussed the matter with other UK charity regulators but has no plans at present to issue guidance to charities in Northern Ireland. The Pensions Regulator has a UK-wide remit to provide support and advice to trustees, administrators, employers and others where potential problems are identified.

Cold Weather Payments

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the eligibility criteria for cold weather payments.

(AQW 17676/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Cold Weather Payments provide help to vulnerable people, regardless of age, to meet heating costs incurred, or likely to be incurred during periods of exceptionally cold weather, in the area where they live.

Payments are triggered when the average temperature is, or is forecast to be, zero degrees centigrade or below over 7 consecutive days from 1 November to 31 March. This information is supplied to the Social Security Agency by the Met Office based on recordings and forecasts at 7 separate weather stations located at Aldergrove, Castlederg, Glenanne, Katesbridge, Magilligan, Stormont and Thomastown, each of which cover a range of designated post code areas. Payments are at the rate of £25 for each 7 day cold weather period and are issued automatically.

To qualify for a Cold Weather Payment a claimant must be receiving:

- State Pension Credit, or income-related Employment and Support Allowance (main phase) for a least one day in a period of cold weather; or

- they or their partner must be in receipt of Income Support, income-based Jobseekers Allowance or income-related Employment and Support Allowance (in the assessment phase) for at least one day in the period of cold weather and:
 - have a dependent child aged under five; or
 - have a relevant pensioner or disability premium; or
 - be entitled to Child Tax Credit for a child or qualifying young person who is disabled or severely disabled.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development at what stage is the process of assessing the entitlement of people currently on Incapacity Benefit who are moving to Employment and Support Allowance.

(AQW 17677/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Of the approximate 83,000 claimants due to undergo the Incapacity Benefit Reassessment process the latest figures, up to the end of September 2012, indicate that 38,145 claimants have now started the journey. This is 45.6% of the total claimants predicted to undergo reassessment.

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Appeal Panels: Payment

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how much panel members receive in payment for an oral appeal for Employment and Support Allowance or Disability Living Allowance.

(AQW 17678/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Panel members are paid on a half-day sessional basis, with each session comprising a minimum of two and a maximum of four hearings, depending on case complexity. A session can be a combination of paper and oral hearings. The current fees payable to panel members are detailed below.

Panel member	Fee per Session
Legal chairman	£224
Medical member (GP)	£155 for first 40 sessions £185.50 for 41st session onwards
Disability qualified member	£96

Appeal Panels: Membership

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the process for assessing and choosing members for Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance oral appeal panels.

(AQW 17679/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The President of Appeal Tribunals has statutory responsibility for the selection of tribunal members. Selection is based on training in the relevant benefit, the member's availability and travel considerations.

Employment and Support Allowance: Appeals

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development, over the last two years, how many people have appealed after being deemed ineligible for Employment and Support Allowance following their medical assessment and have then won their appeal.

(AQW 17680/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Information is not available in the format sought. The table below details the number of ESA appeals received by The Appeals Service and how many have been determined. The Chairman of the tribunal records whether the decision made on appeal was more advantageous than the original ruling. This may include decisions to increase the allowance or that a new award should be made.

Period	No. of Appeals Received (i)	Appeals Determined (ii)	Outcome more advantageous (iii)
2010-11	5,538	5,035	1,641
2011-12	7,773	6,318	2,193

Note:

- (i) Any appeal lodged with the social security agency is subject to reconsideration and may not therefore progress to The Appeals Service. Appeals may not be dealt with in the same year that they are received.

- (ii) The appeals determined figures represent those cases where a final outcome has been reached following a hearing(s).
- (iii) An ESA appeal may be against a decision of non-entitlement or a decision against the work-related activity group the claimant is placed in.

Personal Independence Payment: Assessments

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the differences in the Personal Independence Payment assessments that will be delivered by ATOS and those which will be delivered by Capita.

(AQW 17681/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In Northern Ireland Personal Independence Payment assessments will be undertaken solely by Capita Business Services – Atos will not be involved in carrying out Personal Independence Payment assessments. The assessment criteria to be used in underpinning the Personal Independence Payment assessment was announced by the Department for Work and Pensions on the 13 December 2012 and this will apply both to assessments undertaken Great Britain and in Northern Ireland. My Department consulted widely with interested parties in Northern Ireland on the assessment criteria to be used in the assessment process prior to the 13 December announcements.

Personal Independence Payment: Capita

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development whether the medical assessments to be carried out by Capita are to determine how people can carry out work or how they can cope with their illness.

(AQW 17682/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Capita Business Services Limited will undertake assessments for the purpose of assisting Social Security Agency decision makers determine whether there is an entitlement to Personal Independence Payment.

The assessment considers an individual's ability to carry out a range of key everyday activities which are considered fundamental to everyday life and which have a strong focus on daily living and mobility needs. The assessment does not consider whether a person can carry out work as Personal Independence Payment is payable to disabled people regardless of whether or not they are in employment.

Housing: Cost of Welfare Reform

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether his Department has any plans to undertake an assessment of the projected costs to housing as a result of the implementation of the welfare reforms; and to outline these assessments.

(AQW 17690/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Annual financial estimates as a consequence of housing benefit reductions arising from the welfare reform changes are set out in the table below:

Measure	Effective Date	Benefit Reduction
4 bedroom LHA cap	April 11	£ 247,972
Local Housing Allowance 30th Percentile	April 11	£ 21,024,510
Shared Accommodation Rate (24 -34 year olds)	January 12	£ 9,204,000
Consumer Price Index Uplift	April 13	£ 3,111,627
Under occupation in social rented sector	April 13	£ 17,331,120
	Total	£ 50,919,229

Source: Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations

From April 13 the total award of household benefit payments for working-age claimants will be capped at £500 per week for couples and £350 per week for single people. We are awaiting information from HM Revenue and Customs to enable accurate estimates to be made of the numbers who will be affected by this change. Initial indications are that it will be in the hundreds rather than thousands.

There will also be costs for the Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Housing Associations & the private rented sector in implementing the changes and ensuring adequate support is in place to assist those most negatively impacted by the reforms. Currently, we do not have sufficient information to quantify these costs.

We cannot envisage how each tenant and landlord will react to the reforms and much will depend upon each individual's circumstances. Our response to these reforms must be to ensure that everyone has access to an affordable home, be that in the private rented sector or the social housing sector, under a tenancy they can sustain. Officials are working with the Housing Executive to develop a range of support measures to compliment those outlined in my Housing Strategy. I also intend to increase funding available for discretionary housing payments and change the legislation to allow such payments to be made to all social housing tenants.

Queen's Parade, Bangor

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether there is a budget ring-fenced to develop Queens Parade, Bangor and how much has been set aside.

(AQW 17696/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department has ear-marked funding over the next three financial years to take forward a major comprehensive development scheme at Queen's Parade Bangor. As the majority of the funding relates to the purchase of existing landholdings and individual properties it would not be appropriate to release details of the budget at this stage. When the requisite sale contracts are completed, this information will then be a matter of public record.

Social Sector Units

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the total number of vacant social sector units; and how many are in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency.

(AQW 17726/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by parliamentary constituency. However, at 30 November 2012, the Housing Executive had a total of 1870 vacant dwellings across Northern Ireland of which 409 were vacant lettable properties. The remaining 1461 properties were vacant for various reasons such as undergoing repairs, decanting, pending demolition or pending sale.

With regard to the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency, the Housing Executive District Offices for Fermanagh and Dungannon are comparable to that area. At 30 November 2012, there were 31 vacant Housing Executive properties across these two District Offices, of which 12 were vacant lettable properties. The remaining 19 properties were vacant for the same reasons outlined above.

With regard to Housing Associations, there are currently 876 vacant properties throughout Northern Ireland of which 59 are in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone constituency.

I hope that by the end of the financial year the finalised Empty Homes Strategy document will be released and as a result measures will be put in place to ensure that empty homes throughout Northern Ireland are properly targeted and over time brought back into use.

Housing Waiting List: Veterans

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development what percentage of people on the housing waiting list are veterans.

(AQW 17738/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested as the Housing Executive does not routinely collect this information as part of the housing application assessment process.

Queen's Parade, Bangor

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the timeline for his Department's work on Queen's Parade, Bangor.

(AQW 17742/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department has agreed to purchase the Karl Greenfarm Properties Limited land portfolio at Queen's Parade, Bangor to take forward a comprehensive development scheme. Subject to contract, the sale should be completed in February 2013.

Following completion of the sale my Department will commence the process of drawing up detailed plans, securing planning permission and assembling the site to be included within the finally agreed development boundary. This will take in the region of 24 months. In advance of the main scheme proceeding work on a Revitalisation Project to develop new activities and new facilities to encourage people back into the area will start in January 2013.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms: Foyle

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development when the installation of carbon monoxide alarms will be rolled out in the Foyle constituency.

(AQW 17769/11-15)

Mr McCausland: With regard to the Housing Executive, the information is not available in the format requested as they do not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency.

However, the Housing Executive advises that they have been installing carbon monoxide detectors since 2011/12. A carbon monoxide detector scheme for 2,922 properties commenced in February 2012 and included the Housing Executive's Waterside, Waterloo and Collon Terrace district office areas which cover the Foyle constituency. Approximately 80% of the properties originally included in the scheme have had carbon monoxide detectors installed. Any outstanding properties

and refusals of a carbon monoxide detector from previous schemes will be included in heating replacements schemes or dedicated carbon monoxide detector schemes.

In relation to eight Housing Associations which have properties in the Foyle constituency, two have completed the installation of carbon monoxide detectors in all their properties. The remaining six Housing Associations are in the process of installing carbon monoxide detectors and the majority of these will be completed by 2013.

Housing Associations: New Homes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many new homes Housing Associations plan to build in the next three years.

(AQW 17779/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I am currently considering the draft Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) which will operate across the three year timeframe 2013/14 to 2015/16. As the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period ends in 2014/15, only the first two years of this new programme are firm, with plans for the third year determined by the outcome of the next CSR.

I will be happy to provide an update when I have fully considered and approved the programme.

Housing Executive Homes: Ability to Purchase

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development whether tenants can buy their Housing Executive homes.

(AQW 17780/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The majority of tenants can buy their Housing Executive home if they have had their tenancy for at least five years, either with the Housing Executive or a qualifying landlord. Some tenants who have not had a tenancy for the full five years may still be able to buy their home, for example, if their partner or parent was previously the tenant of the property in question.

In certain circumstances tenants will not be able to take advantage of this scheme such as:-

- Tenants of sheltered dwellings
- Tenants with rent and other arrears
- Tenants where the Housing Executive is considering taking legal action for possession of the dwelling due to anti-social behaviour
- There are restrictions on the sale of the majority of one and two bed bungalows
- Squatters

Co-Ownership: Applications

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people have applied for co-ownership in the last twelve months.

(AQW 17781/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A total of 1652 people have applied for co-ownership in the last twelve months.

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Art Pods Project, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the art pods project for Queen's Parade, Bangor.

(AQW 17831/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In September I visited Bangor to announce funding for a project to revitalise the Queen's Parade area of the town, which included 12 specially designed artist's pods that could provide accommodation for up to 24 artists. Construction work on the project is due to commence in January 2013 and be completed by 31 March 2013

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development whether a Winter Fuel Allowance will be issued this winter.

(AQW 17894/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A Winter Fuel Payment is paid to eligible claimants each winter to provide help with fuel bills. Release of payments started on the 3rd November and continued to the 18th November 2012 with payments crediting to claimants accounts by 27th November. The specific payment dates were determined by the benefit the claimant is entitled to. Payments have been made to some 318,000 older people.

For the small amount of claimants who applied for the payment for the first time, the Winter Fuel Payment Centre made these payments during the period 17th November to 9th December to successful applicants who made their claim before 21st

September 2012. For successful applications received after 21st September and before the closing date of 31st March 2013, payments will be issued during the period 9th February to 2nd May 2013.

Welfare Reform Bill: European Convention on Human Rights

Mr Swann asked the Minister for Social Development whether he will waive legal privilege and publish the Memorandum on the Compatibility of the Welfare Reform Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights.

(AQW 17904/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would advise that as the memorandum on the compatibility of the Welfare Reform Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights contains legal opinion, it is considered a restricted document. Having consulted with Departmental Solicitors I consider this would create an unwarranted precedent and I am not therefore prepared to publish the Memorandum.

As regards a detailed Human Rights assessment, I can confirm that before the Bill was introduced to the Assembly I signed a statement of Legislative Competence to the effect that the Bill is considered compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as required under section 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This includes an assessment of the Bill's compatibility with Convention rights and Community Law. My officials have undertaken to expand on the reference to Human Rights' compatibility in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum attaching to the Bill.

Welfare Reform Bill: European Convention on Human Rights

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development to list each person who assisted in writing the Memorandum on the Compatibility of the Welfare Reform Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights.

(AQW 17905/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not accepted practice to list individuals associated with the completion of Memoranda such as the Memorandum on the Compatibility of the Welfare Reform Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights.

As regards a detailed Human Rights assessment, I can confirm that before the Bill was introduced to the Assembly I signed a statement of Legislative Competence to the effect that the Bill is considered compatible with the European Convention on Human Rights as required under section 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This includes an assessment of the Bill's compatibility with Convention rights and Community Law. My officials have undertaken to expand on the reference to Human Rights' compatibility in the Explanatory and Financial Memorandum attaching to the Bill.

The memorandum on compatibility of the Welfare Reform Bill with the European Convention on Human Rights contains legal opinion and is therefore a restricted document.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17911/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Department's arm's length bodies are committed to paying all suppliers promptly and the same payment process applies to all invoices, regardless of which sector they come from. Invoices are processed in order of their receipt date, therefore no sector is paid any quicker than another. The performance of each body at October 2012 is included below.

Housing Executive:	75% within 30 days.
ILEX:	99% within 30 days.
Charity Commission:	100% within 30 days.

Charity Commission

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline the total cost of running the Charity Commission since it was established.

(AQW 17917/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The total cost of running the Commission since it was established on 27 March 2009 to 31 March 2012 is £1,986,748.

Gritting: Peace Bridge, Derry

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department will take on gritting the Peace Bridge in Derry this winter.

(AQW 18086/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Ilex Urban Regeneration Company is responsible for the maintenance of the Peace Bridge in Londonderry. The Department has asked Ilex to take such measures as are reasonable to ensure that users of the Peace Bridge will be reasonably safe, including undertaking a programme of salting the pedestrian surface of the bridge when icy conditions are forecast.

Northern Ireland Assembly Commission

Parliament Buildings: Cost of Access Work

Mr Allister asked the Assembly Commission to provide a breakdown of the (i) cost to date; and (ii) projected cost, of the access work being undertaken at the front of Parliament Buildings.

(AQW 17270/11-15)

Mr P Ramsey (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): The Assembly Commission has always been mindful of the need to make Parliament Buildings more accessible to all users and, following consultation with representatives of disability support groups, agreed to extend the ramped access to the building (previously available at the side entrances only) to include the primary entrance to the building.

The construction work has been completed to a high standard in keeping with the impressive frontage of the listed building and greatly improves the visitor experience, particularly for visitors with mobility issues.

The estimated cost of the project, including professional fees (excl. Vat) is £300k. Some minor additional work items, including areas of smooth paving to further improve accessibility, were included in the project but the final project cost will still be within the approved figure.

- (i) The cost to date of the construction works is £179,058.52 (excl. Vat)
- (ii) The projected final cost of the construction work is £260k (excl. Vat)

Prompt Payment

Mr McGlone asked the Assembly Commission what practices, protocols and measures are in place to ensure prompt payments to contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers.

(AQO 3043/11-15)

Mr Cree (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): On 1 December 2008, the former Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Nigel Dodds MLA, announced a target for all NI Departments to pay invoices within 10 working days of receipt. At that time further guidance was issued from the Department of Finance and Personnel to Accounting Officers highlighting the commitment of the NI Civil Service departments to the Better Payments Practice Code, as detailed in Annex 4.6 of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI). While it is recognised that the Assembly Commission is not a "department" it is committed to ensuring that the principles of best practice, as detailed in MPMNI are applied.

On the introduction of this new target all of processes for receiving, checking and approving invoices was reviewed. New processes and controls were introduced within the financial accounting systems, specifically designed to ensure that where possible queries are resolved promptly and that this enhanced target is achieved.

Each year the Assembly Commission publishes its policy on payment of suppliers (including all third party payments) and the performance against this and other targets in the Annual Report and Resource Accounts. The following table indicates its performance over the past number four years:

Percentages of third party invoices (including, contractors, sub-contractors and suppliers) paid within targets

Target for Payment	Years			
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
30 days after delivery of goods or issue of invoice (whichever is latest)	98.30%	98.70%	98.60%	98.50%
10 days after delivery of goods or issue of invoice (whichever is latest)	N/A	96.10%	96.00%	95.30%

Youth Assembly

Mr Eastwood asked the Assembly Commission to detail what meetings have been held on planning for the establishment of the Youth Assembly.

(AQW 17745/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): Following research work by Assembly officials, initial proposals for the development of a Youth Assembly were presented to stakeholders, including young people, in October

2009. Informal discussions were also held with a range of stakeholders including officials from the OFMDFM, the Department of Education, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People (NICCY), the Northern Ireland Youth Forum and Public Achievement.

The Youth Panel, comprising 30 young people aged 16-18, worked to develop the proposals between March 2010 and February 2011. It undertook a range of research and evidence gathering activities including meetings with a wide range of stakeholders, including parties represented in the Assembly, regional workshops with young people, research visits to other youth assemblies and an online survey. Additional research was also undertaken by the Assembly's Research and Library Service to support this work.

The Youth Panel published its proposals for a pilot Youth Assembly for Northern Ireland in the spring of 2011 with a closing date of the September of the same year. Following the close of the consultation period, representatives from the Youth Panel met in November 2011 to consider the consultation and, based on the responses, to shape the proposals to the Commission.

A subsequent meeting was convened by Assembly officials with representatives of the youth sector to consider age appropriate and innovative approaches to recruitment. Consideration of this issue in particular was given to ensure that suitable messages, methods of communication, recruitment approaches and levels of support were established that encouraged application from young people of all descriptions throughout Northern Ireland.

Discussions have been undertaken with officials in the Department for Education and the OFMDFM. Further discussions are planned with officials in the Department for Employment and Learning and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, as these departments have programme funds aimed at young people.

A paper outlining options to seek support from Executive Departments will be presented to the Assembly Commission in January 2013.

Youth Assembly

Mr Eastwood asked the Assembly Commission, in relation to the Youth Assembly, to detail the (i) terms of reference; (ii) constitution; and (iii) election process.

(AQW 17747/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission):

(i) **Terms of reference**

An over-arching structure which details the number of Youth Assembly Members, the duration of a term and the frequency of meetings has been proposed based on responses to the consultation exercise held in 2011. It is anticipated that there will be 54 Members of the Youth Assembly (MYAs) comprising three from each constituency. In addition, it is expected that a Youth Assembly mandate will be two years, with up to 10 meetings a year scheduled.

It is expected that that the elected Members of the Youth Assembly will create the terms of reference.

(ii) **Constitution**

Similarly, it is expected that the elected Members of the Youth Assembly will create the constitution.

(iii) **Election process**

Membership of the Youth Assembly would be determined by a regulated selection process. It is important that the MYAs are reflective of their peer group and there must be reference to Section 75 as appropriate.

The opportunity to become an MYA will have to be communicated widely through a number of different media and will also be communicated directly to young people and through a variety of organisations, including schools and youth groups, etc. This approach is required to ensure that the recruitment reaches and is open to as broad an audience as possible, with the emphasis on being as resourceful and innovative as possible in reaching the target age group. The facility to receive applications in a variety of formats would need to be established to overcome any barriers that young people may experience.

Recruitment will be held in all constituencies with three representatives from each being appointed.

Youth Assembly

Mr Eastwood asked the Assembly Commission when it is envisioned that the Youth Assembly will first sit.

(AQW 17749/11-15)

Mr McElduff (The Representative of the Assembly Commission): A paper detailing options to seek support from Executive Departments to fund a Youth Assembly will be presented to the Assembly Commission in January 2013. Until the Commission has had the opportunity to review the information contained in that paper, it is not possible to provide a date at this stage.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 11 January 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister to detail (i) the number of Freedom of Information requests received by their Department in each year since 2007; (ii) the proportion of requests each year that were not answered within the time limit; (iii) the number of requests currently outstanding by more than (a) one to two months (b) three to four months; (c) five to six months; (d) seven to twelve months; and (e) more than twelve months.

(AQW 16779/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): The information requested at (i) and (ii) above is published in the FOI Annual Reports for the years 2007 to 2011, which can be accessed from the OFMDFM website at:

http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/improving-public-services/information_management_and_central_advisory_branch/annual-reports-and-statistics.htm

The information requested at (iii) is provided in the table below:

(iii)	Requests Currently Outstanding (At Mid-December)	Number of Requests
(a)	1-2 months	5
(b)	3-4 months	3
(c)	5-6 months	4
(d)	7-12 months	3
(e)	More than 12 months	25

Social Investment Fund

Mr Copeland asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the Social Investment Fund will address deprivation within the time period and the finance available.

(AQW 16867/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The issues associated with poverty and deprivation, which the Social Investment Fund aims to address, are not new. There are a range of other initiatives trying to impact on the same issues, which have had varying levels of success in the past.

Nonetheless, the problems persist in some areas and the Social Investment Fund not only provides enhanced funding to help tackle these historically difficult issues but also affords an opportunity to bind together and integrate work to achieve maximum impact.

It is not therefore intended that the Social Investment Fund alone will address all issues associated with deprivation in the current time period or with the existing resources. It will, however, provide vital funding to address identified, evidenced, objective needs within communities, enhance work already ongoing and better integrate efforts to the benefit of local communities.

If successful, we envisage it will be used to inform work going forward across government in the longer term to ensure better collaboration, and that funding is targeted at those interventions which demonstrate impact in communities most in need.

Programme for Government: EU Funds

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Programme for Government commitment to facilitate delivery of the Executive's 20 percent target for increased drawdown of competitive EU funds.

(AQO 2965/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Progress against Programme for Government targets is assessed independently by the PfG Central Team and the Delivery Oversight Group, chaired by the Head of the Civil Service.

A comprehensive monitoring exercise has recently been completed and a report is being prepared. It would be unfair of us to pre-empt this work.

A baseline of £11 million was set against which to measure the Executive's target of a 20% increase in drawdown of competitive EU funds. Meeting our 20% target would result in £53 million of competitive European funding for the Executive. In 2011/12, which was the first year in which we measured progress against the target, almost £16 million was secured to benefit our businesses, groups and citizens.

We continue to drive this work through the Barroso Taskforce Working Group (BTWG). In November, Junior Ministers led a BTWG meeting to consider progress made by Executive departments – not just on funding – but against all of the objectives in our 2012-13 European Priorities. At the halfway point in the year, we can confirm that departments are on track to deliver 95% of targets set.

We will build on this work when we visit Brussels later this month to participate in an EU Peace conference at the invitation of Commissioner Hahn.

Crumlin Road Gaol

Mr McClarty asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how their Department is working with the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to ensure the success of Crumlin Road Gaol as a visitor and conference centre.

(AQW 17302/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Belfast Tours Ltd have been appointed as the operator of the visitor attraction and conference centre, which opened to the public on 19 November. In the first two weeks of operation, over 2000 people took the tour and over 32 conferences have been booked for the months ahead.

Our officials have been working closely with some of DETI's agencies including the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and Invest NI. Discussions are ongoing with the NITB on maximising access to the Gaol and promoting the Gaol as a major tourist attraction.

Invest NI is a key stakeholder on the public sector group which is considering the Gaol as a possible location for creative industries/digital hub and how this might impact on the tourist offer.

Belfast Tours Ltd continues to have extensive links with the Tourist Board. They are currently in discussions with NITB regarding the Gaol facility inclusion in their 2013 campaign and have just recently hosted the World Host Programme for NITB. Belfast Tours Ltd also works very closely with Belfast Welcome Centre, which uses their resources to promote the Gaol.

Childcare Strategy

Mr McGlone asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the Childcare Strategy.

(AQO 2961/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The current Programme for Government includes a commitment to publish and implement a Childcare Strategy to provide integrated and affordable childcare. The Strategy will be aligned with the primary focus of the Programme for Government, which is to grow the economy and tackle disadvantage.

On 5 December 2012, we launched a public consultation on the Executive's proposed Childcare Strategy. The consultation document "Towards a Childcare Strategy" sets out the vision and principles for a future Childcare Strategy and provides an opportunity for those with an interest to help shape the development of the Strategy. The public consultation process runs until 5 March 2013 after which all comments received will be reviewed and a final Childcare Strategy developed. We have also recently taken decisions that would allow up to a further £4.5million to be allocated from the central ring-fenced Childcare Fund to support actions on the ground as the Strategy continues to be developed.

Quangos

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister why there has been no action to reduce the number of operative quangos, in light of recent answers to AOs indicating that the number has risen since 2007.

(AQW 17433/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We stated in our answer to AQW 14782/11-15 that the number of public bodies sponsored by our Department increased by three between 8 May 2007 and 27 September 2012. It should, however, be remembered that, as indicated in our answer, three bodies already existed at 8 May 2007 but did not feature in our previous

answer because the Community Relations Council was not at that time classed as a Non Departmental Public Body and the NI Judicial Appointments Commission and NI Memorial Fund were not then linked to our Department.

The functions of the NIMF will transfer to the new Victims and Survivors Service and the body will close on 31 March 2013. Victims and Survivors funding previously administered by the Community Relations Council transferred to the Victims and Survivors Service during November 2012.

Service Level Agreement

Mr Swann asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 17253/11-15, how many times they have had to use the services provided under the Service Level Agreement in each year since 2010.

(AQW 17770/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's Central Investigation Service has undertaken two investigations on behalf of the Department. One in 2010 and one in 2011/12. The unit also provided six Fraud Awareness Workshops for the Department and its Arm's Length Bodies in 2011.

The Head of the Central Investigation Service attends the Department's Fraud Investigation Oversight Group meetings on a monthly basis.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how each of their Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17924/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The table below shows the performance of our Non Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) against the 30 day prompt payment target during the 2010-11 and 2011-12 financial years.

Name of Arm's Length Body	2010-11	2011-12
Northern Ireland Judicial Appointments Commission	98%	96%
Strategic Investment Board	96%	97%
Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited	74%	96%
Commissioner for Older People for NI	N/A	65%
Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland	47%	69%
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	95%	97%
Commission for Victims and Survivors for Northern Ireland	97%	100%
Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland	97%	99%
Northern Ireland Memorial Fund	100%	100%
Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland	94%	N/A

The Commissioner for Older People for NI was established on 14 November 2011; therefore 2011-12 figures are for the period 14 November 2011 to 31 March 2012 inclusive.

The Economic Research Institute for Northern Ireland formally closed at the end of July 2011.

Our NDPBs do not differentiate between sectors with regard to the timeliness of payments.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect their Department.

(AQW 17925/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The late payment directive currently passing through Westminster is not expected to significantly impact upon our Department.

The Department and all ALBs are legally bound to meet the terms of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended and supplemented by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002. This requires that all payments should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice.

OFMDFM and its sponsored bodies take all possible steps to pay suppliers as promptly as possible. The Department's prompt payment performance for 2011/12 was 95%.

Cross Sector Advisory Forum

Mr Flanagan asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister (i) for an update on the work of the Cross Sector Advisory Forum; (ii) when the forum has met in the last two years; and (iii) who attended each of these meetings.

(AQW 18006/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since 2009, the Cross Sector Advisory Forum met five times, with the last meeting taking place on 3 February 2011. The Forum was set up as a time-limited response to the particular economic and financial circumstances at that time. As well as Ministers, members included the following organisations:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Older People's Advocate | ■ Northern Bank |
| ■ NI Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) | ■ NI Anti-Poverty Network |
| ■ NI Children's Commissioner | ■ Federation of Small Businesses |
| ■ Firmus Energy | ■ First Trust Bank |
| ■ Ulster Federation of Credit Unions | ■ Irish Congress of Trade Unions |
| ■ NI Chamber of Commerce | ■ Consumer Council |
| ■ NI Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) | ■ NI Authority for Utility Regulation (NIAUR) |
| ■ Institute of Directors | ■ NI Advisor on Employment and Skills |
| ■ NI Local Government Association (NILGA) | ■ Construction Employers' Federation |
| ■ Construction Industry Group | ■ Bank of Ireland |
| ■ Irish League of Credit Unions | ■ NIE Energy Supply |
| ■ Phoenix Natural Gas | ■ Energy Generators |
| ■ Ulster Farmers' Union | ■ 4 Independent Members |
| ■ Ulster Bank | |

The Forum played a pivotal role in drawing up the Executive's strategy for dealing with the economic downturn. It provided advice and recommendations when drawing together the Executive's Priority Measures to Deal with the Economic Downturn, which was published on 20 May 2010. The Priority Measures included 151 different recommendations aimed at alleviating the effects of the economic downturn. Significant achievements were made through the completion of recommendations in the areas of planning processes, information made available to the construction industry for public procurement, support for apprentices, support for the unemployed, benefits entitlement, addressing poverty, the social economy, support for local business and supporting the local housing market. A Post Programme Evaluation on the Priority Measures package is currently under way.

Community Relations Council: Funding

Mr Allister asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, given that FAIR received a letter of offer, why it is now excluded from Community Relations Council funding.

(AQW 18007/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The responsibility for administering Victims and Survivors funding transferred from the Community Relations Council to the Victims and Survivors Service on 12 November 2012. Neither we nor our Department are involved in the assessment process and therefore cannot comment on any individual group's application.

The Service recently opened the application process for the 2013-15 Victims and Survivors Programme. The call for applications closed on Monday 17 December 2012.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

EU Commission: Penalties

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the resources, required to meet expected EU Commission penalties, in relation to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, have been sourced.

(AQW 17523/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): The total amount of the EU Financial Corrections is £88.3m and has been funded from a number of sources.

The majority (£54.5m) was absorbed by year-end underspends from other Government Departments. This was managed at Block level within End Year Flexibility.

Funding was also secured from DEFRA (£11.2m), non Budget cover (£14.2m) and a successful bid (£2.3m) in the 2009-10 financial year.

The Department made internal funding available (£8.6m) and benefited from an exchange rate gain (£2.5m).

Tree Planting: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the level of proposed tree planting for the North Down area in the next 3 years.

(AQW 17836/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Woodland Grant Scheme is a permissive scheme and provides the applicant with approval to plant new woodland. This approval does not commit them to plant.

Applications for the Scheme are usually made several months before the planting takes place. Currently there are 1.25ha of new woodland applied for in North Down. Forest Service expects further applications will be submitted in 2013 and 2014 prior to planting.

Caravan Parks: Forest Service

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development whether any facilities in East Antrim will benefit from the recently announced £4 million investment by Forest Service for upgrading caravan parks.

(AQW 17840/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has secured £4m under the Jobs & Economy Initiative to help with the development of recreation & tourism projects, including caravan sites, in forests over the next two business years. This presents a significant opportunity for strategic partners, including Councils such as Moyle to take forward proposals they may have to up-grade visitor provision in forests in their area.

Regarding your specific query about facilities in the East Antrim area, my Department is currently progressing a Memorandum of Understanding with Moyle District Council for the development of recreation and leisure products in forests within the Council area. I believe this provides an excellent framework and opportunity for projects such as upgrading and management of our caravan parks to be taken forward within the timeframe of this Fund.

Single Farm Payment

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department is taking to ensure that farmers who are subject to an inspection receive their Single Farm Payment without delay.

(AQW 17896/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: As announced shortly before Christmas, my Department has completed 82.8% of 2012 Single Farm Payment claims and paid £184.1 million into farmers' bank accounts in December. The vast majority of these payments were received by farmers before Christmas. The claims that cannot be paid at this stage have queries that need to be resolved or require complex assessments which take longer to clear.

In relation to inspected cases, we have made good progress this year and have been able to pay over 500 claims involving inspections in December. This is a significant improvement on last year and is in the main attributed to the earlier commencement of inspections in 2012, the introduction of Control with Remote Sensing for some land inspections and additional human resource made available to process the findings of inspections.

The 2012 inspection programme identified a large number of changes to maps and land which is ineligible for payment. In many cases these changes date back a number of years and this means that entitlements and payments allocated to these farm businesses in previous years have to be recalculated in order to calculate the correct amount due for 2012. We are working to complete all the remaining claims at the earliest practical date, but we must also administer the scheme in a way that avoids further disallowances by the European Union and this means payments cannot be released until the correct amount due has been calculated.

Ash Dieback: Emergency Hotline

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what response times are being achieved by the Forest Service Ash Die Back Emergency Hotline and what targets have been set.

(AQW 17996/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: If people are concerned about symptoms in ash they can contact DARD on 0300 200 7847 or email dardhelpline@dardni.gov.uk. At 14 December numbers of calls and emails to the helpline have been limited. All information provided is assessed and prioritised. Inspections of suspect trees, if appropriate, are factored into ongoing survey work associated with the Chalara dieback surveillance plan. At 14 December a total of 740 premises have been surveyed with 23 of these inspections having been initiated by helpline enquires.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how her Department is working with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, which manages designated forestry sites, to combat and help eradicate Ash Die Back; and (ii) whether any actions undertaken by her Department have been approved by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and on what date.

(AQW 17997/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My officials are in regular contact with the Environment Agency here on a range of plant health issues. The Environment Agency is represented on the Department's Incident Management Team, which formulates and manages the actions we are taking in response to Chalara dieback in Ash.

Ash Dieback Disease

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development why Forest Service's does not publish the sites where Ash Dieback has been found, given that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has published on this issue and how does this assist in advising the public to be vigilant of the disease.

(AQW 17999/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Sites where Chalara dieback in Ash has been found are published on the Department's website at www.dardni.gov.uk/ash-dieback. Our policy is to publish the precise location of publicly owned sites and the county for sites in private ownership, along with a map of current outbreak sites in the north. This map indicates the general location of outbreak sites, consistent with map produced by Defra. Other information is available on both the DARD and NIDirect websites, which will assist the public in being vigilant for the disease.

Departmental Headquarters

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, pursuant to AQW 17430/11-15, which specific sites within each listed District Council area were considered as options when making the decision to relocate the Department's headquarters.

(AQW 18036/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The shortlisting process considered District Council areas, not specific sites. This process resulted in the top two District Council areas being in the North West. It was the availability of the Executive owned site at Ballykelly that was the final determining factor that I used to decide on the location.

Woodland

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what action her Department has taken to increase woodland cover in the last 12 months.

(AQW 18064/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: During 2012 we provided £0.77 million in grant aid up to the end of November under the Rural Development Programme to encourage farmers and landowners to plant 235 ha of new woodland and to maintain plantations established in previous years.

Forest Service publicised the support available for planting at Balmoral Show, the Green Living Fair, the Ulster Farmers Union Spring Farm Focus event, the Practical on Farm Renewable energy event, Planting Native Trees in Environmental and Woodland Schemes event and other agricultural shows and events.

I was able to visit some older woodland to learn about the experience of tree planters, which was reported in the press. I also met stakeholders to discuss forestry proposals under the next EU Rural Development Regulation. I jointly launched the Future Trees Trust with my southern counterpart, Shane McEntee, and the work of the Trust to improve the quality of our future broadleaved woodland was reported in the press. During the year I replied to a number of written and oral questions from Members of the Legislative Assembly on woodland creation.

Forest Service met afforestation stakeholders on two occasions during the year to discuss the draft Rural Development Regulation and proposals for forestry measures under the next Rural Development Programme.

Forest Service: Board

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) to detail the current make up of the Forest Service Board; and (ii) whether she will consider nominating or appointing individuals from the private sector onto the Forest Service Board.

(AQW 18065/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill:

i The Forest Service Chief Executive is advised by a Management Board comprising four Executive Directors and a Non-Executive Director.

The four Executive Directors are senior Forest Service Managers;

- 1 John Joe O'Boyle - Director of Forestry
- 2 Sheryl Henderson - (Acting) Corporate Services Director
- 3 Stuart Morwood - Woodland Development & Strategies Directorate
- 4 Ian Irwin - Forest Management Directorate

The Non-Executive Director is Pauline Keegan, who is also a Senior Civil Servant, working in another part of the Department. The Non-Executive Director role is to provide objective and constructive challenge, as necessary, and expertise and advice to assist the Board to take executive decisions.

- ii. The Forest Service Chief Executive is responsible to me for the Agency's performance and operations. As such, he is responsible for the arrangements for effective governance, and keeps these under review.

Woodland: Planting Approvals

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development (i) how the planting approvals for new woodland is currently being processed, considering the pressure on her Department from containing and investigating Ash Dieback; (ii) how many planting approvals have been granted in the last four weeks compared to the same period last year; and (iii) what are the reasons for any differences.

(AQW 18067/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Planting approvals for new woodland are currently being processed by Forest Service. There have been some delays as a result of (a) amending planting approvals to remove ash and substitute with other tree species due to Chalara die-back and (b) to engage with stakeholders to agree a revised approval and claim process to comply with EC regulation.

During the 4 weeks prior to the Christmas holiday period Forest Service approved 34 new woodland approvals in 2012 (26 November – 21 December) and 13 new woodland approvals in 2011 (28 November – 23 December). More new woodland approvals were issued in the 4 weeks prior to Christmas in 2012 compared with 2011 because Forest Service had held approval documents to ensure that they were issued without a specification to plant ash and complied with the revised approval and claim process.

Woodlands: Native Seeds

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development what has her Department done to promote the use and production of more native seeds for woodlands.

(AQW 18068/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: Forest Service participated in the Seeds of Time and Place Steering Group, which promoted the local collection of seeds of native trees for nursery production and produced practical guidance for growing trees from seed.

As chair and facilitator of the NI Native Woodland Group, Forest Service published a collaborative booklet, Native Woodlands Definitions and Guidance, to inform and advise practitioners involved with planning and planting new native woodland. The booklet includes advice regarding the preferred use of planting stock grown from Irish seed sources.

Pig Producers

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, what action she has taken to protect and support pig producers, given that the latest figures suggest that only 5 Member States, including the UK, are fully compliant with the EU's partial ban on sow stalls.

(AQW 18078/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department has published several articles to remind pig producers of the requirements of the Pig Welfare Directive which came into force on 1 January 2013. A letter has been issued to every pig keeper in the north of Ireland and articles have appeared in the farming press, the Pig Bulletin which is produced by CAFRE pig technologists, and the "Helping You Comply Bulletin" which is produced by the Department's Farm Advisory Service.

My Department's Veterinary Service has inspected a number of pig holdings in 2012, including smaller holdings, to remind farmers of the need to take the necessary steps to comply with the Directive and to help address any issues that they may have.

The use of sow stalls has been banned here and in Britain since 1999 and the main provisions of the Pig Welfare Directive are contained within the Welfare of Farmed Animals Regulations 2012. From the provisional data submitted to the European Commission, I understand that 14 Member States expect to be in full compliance with the sow stall ban from 1 January 2013 in addition to Britain and the north, and Sweden and Luxembourg where there is already a complete ban on sow stalls.

Under the first two tranches of the Farm Modernisation Programme (FMP), financial support totalling just over £0.20m was made available to 39 businesses here where the main activity was pig farming. I have been informed that 45 pig farmers have applied to Tranche 3 of the FMP seeking financial support of some £0.15m.

Discussions are on-going at EU level to ensure early compliance with the Directive. The European Commission has been clear all along that it will not allow Member States to impose unilateral trade restrictions and it has said that it will impose infraction proceedings immediately in January 2013 against non compliant Member States.

Capital Projects: Funding

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail all the funding schemes her Department makes available for capital projects

(AQW 18079/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The capital projects/schemes funded by my department in 2012/13 are shown in the tables below, being:

- Table 1. Capital Projects funded by DARD
- Table 2. Capital Grant Schemes funded by DARD.

Table 1. Capital Projects funded by DARD

Business Area	Project Description	Project Description
Rivers Agency	Flood Alleviation	Connswater Community Greenway Project. Ballygawley Scheme Coleraine Lodge Burn
Rivers Agency	Drainage Infrastructure	Portna – Lower Bann Culverts Upgrading
Rivers Agency	Flood Risk Management	Flood hazard and Flood Risk Maps
Rivers Agency	Accommodation.	Omagh Regional Office
Rivers Agency	Recurrent Capital	Plant, Vehicles and Machinery
Forest Service	Construction	Access road, Glenderg Forest
Forest Service	Recurrent Capital	Plant, Vehicles and Machinery
CAFRE	Construction	Silos at Greenmount Campus
CAFRE	Construction.	Dairy Unit at Greenmount Campus
CAFRE	Minor projects.	Minor projects (16) under £100k
Area Based Schemes Development Unit	DARD Direct Offices	Refurbishment to meet DARD Direct specifications. (Funds transferred to DFP Properties Division).
Finance Division Estate Branch	Refurbishment	Installation of switch gear, cabling and ducting.
Finance Division Estate Branch	Minor projects.	Minor projects (5) under £100k
Information Systems Branch	Graphical Information System (GIS).	Provision of Corporate GIS Solution
Information Systems Branch/Forest Service	Survey Equipment	Survey equipment for Ash Dieback Disease
Information Systems Branch/Veterinary Service	APHIS System	Security improvements and enhancements
Information Systems Branch/Veterinary Service	Slaughter Line Post Mortem Recording.	Replacement of old equipment.
Information Systems Branch	Minor projects.	Minor projects (4) under £100k

Table 2. Capital Grant Schemes funded by DARD

Business Area	Scheme Title	Scheme Description
Forest Service,	Woodland Grant Scheme	Woodland expansion Sustainable management of existing woodlands
CAFRE	New Entrants Scheme	Interest Relief for Farmers on borrowings for capital projects
Rural Development	Tackling Rural Poverty	DSD Warm Homes Scheme. Power NI Free Insulation Scheme Rural Borewells Scheme
Rural Development	NIRDP Axis 1	Processing & Marketing Grant Scheme Farm Modernisation Programme Manure Efficiency Technology Scheme. Focus Farms Scheme

Business Area	Scheme Title	Scheme Description
Rural Development.	NIRDP Axis 3	Farm diversification Small business creation and development Tourism activities Improving basic services in rural areas Village renewal projects Conservation of rural heritage
Rural Development	Interreg IVA	Developing a dynamic economy. Supporting infrastructure. Promoting innovative ways of addressing specific cross-border problems.
Fisheries and Environment	European Fisheries Fund (EFF)	Support for the NI Fishing Industry, adaptation of the fishing fleet, aquaculture, processing and marketing, measures of collective benefit sustainable development of fisheries areas
Fisheries and Environment	Electronic equipment.	Electronic Logbook Software Systems.
Climate Change and Renewable Energy	Biomass Processing Challenge Fund	Installation of biomass-fuelled renewable energy technologies.

Capital Projects: Farmers and Processors

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to outline the support for capital projects awarded to (i) farmers; and (ii) processors by her Department in each of the last 5 years.
(AQW 18082/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The financial support for capital projects awarded to farmers and processors by my Department in the last five years are included in the table below:

Table 1: DARD Capital Grants

	2007-08 £'000	2008-09 £'000	2009-10 £'000	2010-11 £'000	2011-12 £'000
Farmers	33,576	90,811	7,000	9,393	17,538
Processors	207	633	2,552	3,890	1,914
Total	33,783	91,444	9,552	13,283	19,452

Telephone Bills

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the cost to her Department of telephone bills in each of the last three years.
(AQW 18084/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The cost of telephone bills, which includes the costs of calls, line rental, installation and provision of hand sets and equipment at all sites operated by my Department over the last three financial years are as follows: -

2009/2010	£478,890
2010/2011	£533,935
2011/2012	£532,469

Bovine TB: Costs

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development for a breakdown of the costs associated with bovine TB in each of the last three years.

(AQW 18138/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: My Department holds this information by financial year. The latest full year for which data is available is 2011/12. The table below provides a breakdown for each element of expenditure on the TB eradication programme.

Year	AFBI Costs	Private Veterinary Practitioner Costs	TB Compensation Costs	DARD Staff Costs	DARD Funded Research	Haulier Costs	Misc	Tuberculin	Salvage	Total
2009/10	844,369	6,500,752	9,910,768	5,581,846	289,723	135,326	139,734	724,205	--1,079,579	23,047,144
2010/11	1,045,583	6,286,278	8,593,038	5,792,472	457,385	57,527	132,233	558,740	-826,347	22,096,909
2011/12	1,185,654	6,540,225	12,910,656	6,181,800	452,695	71,685	136,491	560,740	--1,381,225	26,658,721

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Derry City Football Club

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure how much funding her Department and its arm's-length bodies have committed to spending on Derry City Football Club.

(AQW 15513/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): Neither my Department nor its arms-length bodies have committed any funding to be spent on Derry City Football Club.

Stadiums: Subregional Development

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure why (i) Derry City Council was not previously informed that the £36m funding for sub-regional stadium development would only be available from 2015 onwards; and (ii) why it has taken nearly four months to acknowledge receipt of the business case for the Brandywell Stadium, Brandywell Showgrounds and the Daisyfield and to inform the council that no funding currently exists.

(AQW 16217/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Facts around funding for sub-regional stadium development and in particular how this impacts on the Brandywell Stadium continue to be misrepresented.

You will be aware that I have not only consistently kept Derry City Council, Derry City FC and local politicians fully informed of the position in relation to funding for sub regional stadium development, but I also met with Derry City Council officials on 21 September 2011 and 01 March 2012 where the Brandywell redevelopment was specifically discussed.

I enclose copies of previous correspondence issued to Derry City Council and you personally in this regard. I fail therefore to see how this message has been misinterpreted in the way it has been.

The Derry City Council letter, enclosing its Business Case, sought a meeting with me to present the case. Given the above position it was clear that such a meeting would not be productive, however, I wished to consider how best my Department might engage with the Council on other aspects of its proposal. Having done so, I concluded that my officials, and those of SportNI, should meet with Derry City Council in relation to the Showgrounds and Daisyfield elements of the redevelopment since these have specific socio-economic and equality implications beyond sub-regional stadium considerations. I am awaiting the report of this and will continue to focus on it closely.

Stadiums: Brandywell

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, in light of Derry City Football Club's recent FAI success and consequent qualification for Europe, whether she will reconsider her decision and provide funding at a sub-regional level to assist with the development of the Brandywell stadium.

(AQW 16298/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: I have already issued a public statement congratulating Derry City FC on their Cup Final win. I would point out that I have made no decision on funding at sub regional level to assist with the development of the Brandywell or any of the other sub regional stadia nor is any decision possible at this stage.

I have consistently stated that the Brandywell Stadium development will be considered in due course, in the context of a funding programme for local stadium development. I have also consistently stated that there is currently no Executive money

available to fund such development in the immediate term, but that this will remain a DCAL objective in the forthcoming Budget.

I have also insisted that my Department approaches the Brandywell Masterplan on a progressive and positive basis. DCAL officials have been instructed, in the first instance, to meet with Derry City Council about the Showgrounds and Daisyfield elements, since these have specific socio-economic and equality implications beyond sub-regional stadium considerations. I am awaiting a report of this and will continue to focus on it closely.

Football Grounds: Capital Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on the plans for capital spend on football grounds. (AQW 16492/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: As you will be aware the redevelopment of Windsor Park is being taken forward under my Department's Regional Stadium Development Programme with capital spend from Government of up to £25.2m by 2015. The Irish Football Association, in conjunction with my Department's Stadium Programme Director and his team, are making good progress in taking forward the key aspects of the development, including design, planning, consultation and procurement.

Despite the fact that funding must still be secured for local and sub-regional developments, a process has been put in place to take forward sub-regional stadium development should funding become available in the next CSR. The IFA, with the help of SportNI, are developing a draft Strategic Outline Case (SOC) outlining the areas where sub-regional funding might be required. This will provide initial statements of strategic aims, business needs and project objectives. Once completed, the SOC will be considered by the Department and DFP, who assess if the proposals merit the production of Outline Business Cases (OBC) for the various projects within the sub-regional development programme. These OBCs will be used to inform possible bids for funding in the next CSR period.

Belfast Projects: Funding

Mr G Kelly asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to detail the level of funding that his Department and its arm's-length bodies has allocated to each project in the Belfast area since 2007, broken down by constituency. (AQW 16716/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: This response has been delayed due to the need to seek clarification on the question, the volume of information required to answer it and IT problems at a participating arm's length body.

The total amount of funding spent on projects in the Belfast area since 2007 is summarised in the tables below, divided between resource and capital:

RESOURCE

Constituency	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
North Belfast	2,541	3,605	3,561	3,145	3,592
South Belfast	4,720	5,351	6,882	6,542	7,592
East Belfast	91	248	491	793	887
West Belfast	1,933	2,286	3,274	1,998	2,972
Total	9,285	11,490	14,208	12,478	15,050

CAPITAL

Constituency	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	2009/10 £000	2010/11 £000	2011/12 £000
North Belfast	170	550	1,036	871	386
South Belfast	15,832	2,289	2,568	341	410
East Belfast	0	0	1,519	234	4
West Belfast	602	824	558	1,284	241
Total	16,604	3,663	5,681	2,730	1,041

Detailed breakdowns by project are provided in **Annex A**

I should make the following observations. First, the costs of ongoing service provision have not been included in the answer (eg the running costs of individual libraries in the constituencies) as these are not considered to meet the definition of a project.

Second, certain spend has been excluded on the grounds that, while it is possible to associate it with a constituency, its primary objective is not to benefit any particular constituency but to promote and provide benefits generally for the north of Ireland. For instance, spend by World Police and Fire Games falls into this category.

Third, in comparing allocations across constituencies, it is important to appreciate that my Department sometimes provides funding through intermediary parties and does not, therefore, hold information on subsequent allocations across constituencies. For example, Sport NI provides funding to Belfast City Council (BCC) under its Active Communities programme. For the purposes of your question and in the absence of more detailed information, this funding has been allocated in total to the South Belfast constituency (the physical location of BCC HQ).

Fourth, it should be appreciated that, in the case of Arts funding, the pattern of allocation reflects the fact that a number of major venues and organisations are located in the South Belfast constituency (Lyric Theatre, Grand Opera House, Crescent Arts Centre and the Ulster Orchestra). This is particularly evident in 07/08 when, of the total capital spent in that year of £16,604k, £9,237k was attributable to the Lyric Theatre and £4,500k to the Crescent Arts Centre both of which are situated in the South Belfast constituency.

I hope these comments contribute to your understanding of the data.

Football: Ground Infrastructure

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure for an update on funding for Irish League football ground infrastructure.

(AQW 17609/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The IFA, with the help of SportNI, have developed a draft Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to examine potential proposals for sub-regional development which has been approved by the IFA Board. The SOC will now be considered by SportNI, DCAL and ultimately DFP who will assess if the proposals merit the production of Outline Business Cases for the various projects within the sub-regional development programme. These OBCs will be used to inform possible bids for funding in the next CSR period (2015).

I would stress that no funding is available in the current CSR period for sub-regional development for football. It is not anticipated that sub-regional funding will become available until 2015 at the earliest.

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what lessons her Department has learned from the demise of the Northern Ireland Events Company.

(AQW 17730/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Following the demise of the Northern Ireland Events Company in 2007 independent professional financial advisers KPMG were engaged to carry out a comprehensive and authoritative review of the financial affairs of the company, to advise on meeting the existing liabilities of the NIEC and the most appropriate method of winding-up the Company in an orderly manner; and to carry out a comprehensive review of all the circumstances surrounding the deficit accumulated by the NIEC. Furthermore, the Department commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, a professional accountancy body which specialises in the public sector to conduct an external review of the monitoring arrangements between the Department and the other arm's length bodies for which the Department is responsible. As a result of this review, a number of recommendations were made relating to identifiable areas of improvement required to address areas of weakness in DCAL's sponsorship of its Arms Length Bodies. The Department has taken extensive actions in recent years to strengthen its systems of internal control by identifying and incorporating lessons learned. Annex A provides a table of the recommendations and actions taken by the Department.

Annex A

Recommendations	Improvements/Actions
Review Sponsor Organisation Structure	Establishment of Governance Support Unit (GSU) within DCAL who provide a central pool of expertise on the issues of finance, governance and accountability to ALBs and sponsor branches; centralisation of ALB drawdown process; development of sponsorship manual and training for sponsor staff; regular accountability meetings held with attendance at the appropriate senior level by the Department and ALB.
Ensuring sound Corporate Governance in sponsored ALBs	Board skills considered in the public appointments process and skills audit completed; attendance at ALB Board and ALB Audit Committee by appropriate Department senior sponsor level; risk assessments completed on ALBs to inform the sponsorship arrangements; completion of quarterly assurance statements by ALBs.
Financial Planning	Review and update of the Corporate plan and business planning procedures
Financial Control and monitoring	Accountability meetings held and attended at appropriate senior level within ALB and Department; centralisation of ALB drawdowns managed by GSU; monthly monitoring of ALB expenditure by sponsor branch and finance and reported to Departmental Board

Recommendations	Improvements/Actions
Audit and Accounts	Tracking system of ALB Internal and External Audit recommendations

Northern Ireland Events Company

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether her Department has changed its procedures in relation to its arm's-length bodies as a result of lessons learned from the demise of the Northern Ireland Events Company.
(AQW 17731/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Please refer to the answer to your previous question AQW 13131/11-15.

Department of Education

Planning: Manhattan System

Mr Storey asked the Minister of Education, pursuant to AQW16332/11-15, when he plans to implement the capital planning module of Manhattan in his Department.
(AQW 17517/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): I can confirm that my Department has access to information on the condition and suitability of schools which is contained in the Manhattan system. This information is used by the Department in the ongoing prioritisation of maintenance, minor and major works across the Estate and will continue to inform capital investment in the coming years.

Ballee Community High School: Closure

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Education what plans his Department or the North Eastern Education and Library Board has for the Ballee School site after its closure in August 2014.
(AQW 17929/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The North Eastern Education and Library Board has embarked on the statutory consultation process as to the future of Post Primary provision at Ballee High School. At this point in time no decision has been made on the publication of a Development Proposal recommending the closure of the school.

However should that transpire, and the Board has no other educational use for the property, it would be declared surplus to requirements.

The Board will dispose of the premises in accordance with the Land and Property Services Guidelines on the disposal of Public Sector Properties.

Ministerial Advisory Group

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail the current membership of the Ministerial Advisory Group; and the circumstances of each change of membership since the group's inception.
(AQW 18157/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The members of the Shared Education Ministerial Advisory Group are Professor Paul Connolly, Head of School of Education, QUB (Chair), Dawn Purvis, Independent Consultant and former MLA and PJ O'Grady, Founder member of Catholic Principals Association and recently retired Principal of St Patrick's College.

There has been no change to the membership since the Group's inception.

Department for Employment and Learning

One Plan: Magee Campus Expansion

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister for Employment and Learning, pursuant to AQW 17499/11-15, (i) whether he supports the One Plan commitment to expand student numbers at the Magee campus to 9,400 Full-time Equivalents by 2020; (ii) how many additional Full-time Equivalents are required annually at the Magee campus to reach the target of 9,400 by 2020; (iii) to detail the annual cost of providing these additional student places; and (iv) whether he will seek funding from the Executive to ensure that student numbers at the Magee campus reach 9,400 by 2020.
(AQW 18063/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning):

- (i) In its Programme for Government, the Northern Ireland Executive has undertaken to “develop the ‘One Plan’ for the regeneration of Derry/Londonderry, incorporating the key sites at Fort George and Ebrington”. As a member of the Executive, I share this commitment.
- (ii) The One Plan has an aspiration for a university campus which serves 9,400 Full-Time Equivalents including 6,000 full-time undergraduate students. In the 2010-11 year, the last year for which figures are available, there were 2,870 full-time undergraduate students and 565 part-time students at Magee. This would equate to around 3,152 full-time equivalents. By 2015-16 this number will have risen to 3,724 once the 572 additional full-time places allocated in December 2011 and November 2012 have been made available. This means that an additional 5,676 full-time equivalent students would be required to reach the 9,400 target by 2020. This represents an average increase of 1,419 places in each of the four years between 2015-16 and 2019-20.
- (iii) The average cost to support one full-time undergraduate place in the current academic year is £7,313. This includes both institutional grant and student support costs. The full annual cost of an additional 5,676 full-time students would be in the region of £41.5m (assuming each full-time equivalent costs the same as a full-time undergraduate place), or around an additional £10.4m accumulating each year over the four years.
- (iv) I understand that the One Plan has a target of 1,000 additional undergraduate places by 2015. Towards that I have been able to allocate funding for 572 additional places to the University of Ulster. I will take every opportunity to secure additional funding for higher education in Northern Ireland and the University of Ulster and by implication its Magee campus should benefit from this.
- (v) I would also point out that it is for the University of Ulster to determine the overall allocation of student places across each of its campuses and therefore the extent of provision at Magee versus other locations.

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Quinn Insurance: Job Losses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the job losses within Quinn Insurance/Liberty at the Enniskillen site, since the company went into administration.

(AQW 17817/11-15)

Mrs Foster (The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment): Following the appointment of joint administrators in March 2010 and their subsequent review of the Quinn Insurance business, a total of 900 redundancies across all sites were announced in April 2010 to safeguard the future of the business, 179 of which affected the Enniskillen site. The majority of job cuts were made through voluntary redundancy.

Liberty Insurance acquired the Quinn Insurance ROI business in November 2011 and continued to service the Quinn Insurance UK business, on behalf of the Administrators, with no further job losses.

In November 2012, Liberty Insurance announced its plans to exercise a right under the 2011 deal to acquire the renewal rights to Quinn policies in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. In making its announcement, Liberty also confirmed that as a result of a sharp decline in the Quinn Insurance Limited UK business in recent years, a total of 285 redundancies across the company's 3 sites in Cavan, Blanchardstown and Enniskillen would be required in order to position Liberty for sustainable profitability and to protect the remaining jobs in the company. A total of 70 jobs will be lost at the Enniskillen site as a result, mostly through a voluntary redundancy programme which is currently underway.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Planning

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail (i) how many tourism related planning applications the Northern Ireland Tourist Board considered in each of the last five years; (ii) the number it supported; and (iii) the number it refused to support.

(AQW 17830/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information is not readily available, however I will write to the member in due course with the information.

Northern Ireland Tourist Board: Planning

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline why the Northern Ireland Tourist Board supports planning applications for holiday cottages in areas where there is already sufficient provision.

(AQW 17832/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The information is not readily available, however I will write to the member in due course with the information.

Broadband UK

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17573/11-15, what process will be in place to make sure that there is an open and transparent decision procedure including the right to appeal,
(AQW 17900/11-15)

Mrs Foster: As outlined previously the process has already commenced and the intervention area for the project will be informed by the responses to the postcode consultation which was undertaken over the period 12 September to 19 October 2012. The feedback from this exercise is currently being analysed with an intention to publish the outcome on the DETI website. This will include an explanation on how the final intervention area was reached. Opportunities for the general public and the telecommunications industry to inform on this decision have already been provided.

Broadband UK

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17573/11-15, (i) what performance matrix will be used to assess the areas for consultation; and (ii) what weighting will be given to each.
(AQW 17937/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The intervention area is defined on a postcode basis and a postcode is considered within the area if it is listed in information supplied to DETI by BDUK. If a postcode was highlighted in response to the consultation exercise then that postcode was included. Based on local information a postcode is excluded if there are other broadband services in the area such as cable or radio broadband. Steps are now being taken to finalise the intervention area.

In prioritising the roll-out of broadband infrastructure under the Northern Ireland Broadband Improvement Project, my Department will consider matters such as the quality of solution designs, value and pricing, efficiency and economic viability, achieving the best value for money and providing services that are sustainable in the long term.

Tourism: Fishing

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) what consultation there has been between her Department and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the impact on fishing-related tourism if mandatory catch and release is introduced in respect of salmon fishing; and (ii) for her Department's assessment of the potential impact.
(AQW 17953/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) I am aware that the Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL) issued a Public Consultation on Salmon Conservation on 1 May 2012. NITB Officials did not reply in keeping with both OFMdfM guidelines on responding to public consultations, and my Department's guidance regarding same.
- (ii) NITB is planning to meet all angling bodies and DCAL on 17 January 2013. Neither my Department nor NITB have received any queries about the potential issue of mandatory catch and release. We will ask to have this subject raised at a future meeting with DCAL to assess the potential impact.

Broadband UK

Mr B McCrea asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17573/11-15, (i) whether there are any financial profiling issues; and (ii) whether monies will be available in the 2013 fiscal year.
(AQW 17963/11-15)

Mrs Foster: There are no significant profiling issues however in a project as complex and involving as many stakeholders as this I want to ensure that the best outcome is achieved for Northern Ireland. I anticipate that a contract will be in place in 2013 and that monies will be made available for that fiscal year.

Tourism Development Fund

Ms Maeve McLaughlin asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the 23 projects that will receive assistance through the Tourism Development Fund and how the £5.7 million referred to in the recent Jobs and Economy Initiative will be allocated.
(AQW 17964/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The £5.7 million capital secured through the Executive's Economy and Jobs Initiative will be allocated to shortlisted and reserve projects from the last Tourism Development Scheme open call. These projects will now proceed to the next stage of assessment. Projects must be able to demonstrate economic viability and sustainability, value for money and ability to support the delivery of key tourism priorities. In addition, these projects will also be required to confirm the availability of sufficient match funding and relevant statutory approvals etc. before approval can be granted and a letter of offer issued.

Currently these projects are at various stages in the process outlined above and some have yet to receive and/or accept a letter of offer. It therefore would be premature for me to publish or release a list of projects that may or may not accept and therefore may or may not receive financial assistance through the Tourism Development Scheme.

Quinn Group: Job Losses

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, pursuant to AQW 17524/11-15, to detail (i) the dates on which the engagements took place; (ii) who was present at each of these meetings; and (iii) what matters were discussed. (AQW 17967/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Meetings between Senior Management of Quinn Manufacturing Limited and representatives of Invest NI took place on the following dates:

01 June 2011, 24 August 2011, 16 November 2011, 14 February 2012 & 31 October 2012.

I attended the meetings on 16 November 2011 and 31 October 2012. Representatives from DETI Energy Branch also attended the meeting on 31 October 2012.

Matters discussed at these meetings were ongoing operations following the change of control; consolidation and growth plans; potential gas-line extension into the West/North West; transport costs and roads infrastructure.

Invest NI: Senior Salaries

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment whether any senior executives in Invest NI, apart from the Chief Executive, have (i) benefited, or are due to benefit, from salary increases above the level of inflation and; (ii) by how much any such salaries are rising. (AQW 17990/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Senior executives of Invest NI are subject to the terms and conditions, including salary levels, as applicable to the wider NICS senior staff.

Provision for future increases are in line with the Northern Ireland Civil Service Reform of arrangements for Senior Civil Service Pay and Pay Strategy 2012 and 2013, which is available on the DFP website.

www.dfpni.gov.uk/2012_scs_pay_award_strategy_final_version.pdf

Invest NI: Pension Contributions

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the level of the employer and employee pension contributions within Invest NI in regard to (i) the Chief Executive; (ii) other senior executives and; (iii) generally across other staff.

(AQW 17992/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) The Chief Executive, (ii) other senior executives and (iii) generally across other staff, are subject to the same arrangements relating to employer and employee pension contributions as equivalent grades within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

China: Trade Missions

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) how many trade missions to China have been undertaken by her Department and/or Invest NI in the last 10 years; and (ii) which companies from Northern Ireland have accompanied these trade missions.

(AQW 18019/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since November 2004 Invest NI has organised 16 missions to China; on average two per year. Over this period 206 separate companies have participated on Invest NI trade missions with these companies listed below for your information:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Agri Food and Biosciences Institute | ■ Andor | ■ Belfast Metropolitan College |
| ■ AJ Power | ■ Andronics | ■ Biocolor |
| ■ A1 Power | ■ Anglo Beef | ■ Biotancia |
| ■ Academy of Educational Studies | ■ Antrim Hills Spring Water | ■ Biznet |
| ■ Adamsez | ■ Applied Silicate Tech | ■ Boyd Bedding |
| ■ Adria | ■ APT | ■ Bridgedale Outdoor |
| ■ Aepona | ■ APT Fabrics | ■ Brookvent |
| ■ All Ireland Chinese Travel | ■ Autogen | ■ Bubble. |
| ■ Allclear Environmental | ■ Avalon Guitars | ■ C+ Advanced |
| ■ Alpha Environmental | ■ Axis Three | ■ Caldwell & Robinson |
| ■ Amphion | ■ AXT. | ■ Canyon |
| ■ Amtec | ■ Base 2000 | ■ Cape Mist Gloves |
| | ■ Belfast Distillery | ■ CEM |

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| ■ Ciga Healthcare | ■ Hamilton Architects | ■ Niche Drink |
| ■ CJ Higgins | ■ Hamilton Shipping | ■ NiSoft UK |
| ■ Clearway | ■ Hampton Conservatories | ■ North West Academy |
| ■ Clinical Trial Services | ■ Hanna IP (Quaylane Ltd) | ■ NuTech |
| ■ Clonallon | ■ Harco | ■ NWP Recycling |
| ■ Cocoon Europe | ■ Harland and Wolff | ■ OCO Consulting |
| ■ Contact Marketing NI | ■ Haughey Metals | ■ Omiino. |
| ■ Cooneen Textiles | ■ Hawk Protection | ■ Paradox Oil |
| ■ Cooneen Watts and Stone | ■ Hawthorne Contracts | ■ PF Copeland |
| ■ Crane Stockham Valve | ■ Hetal Heating Solutions | ■ Plaswire |
| ■ Cross Refrigeration | ■ HMC Global | ■ Portapig |
| ■ CSR PLC | ■ Howden UK | ■ Pritchitts. |
| ■ Cutting Industries | ■ Huco Lightronic | ■ Queens University of Belfast |
| ■ CWS Waste | ■ Hutchinson Power Products. | ■ Qwizdom UK. |
| ■ Dairy Produce Packers | ■ IBC Trading, Industria | ■ RA Irwin & Co |
| ■ Dale Farm | ■ Protection Systems | ■ Radox Laboratories |
| ■ Daly Golf | ■ Ireland Resource | ■ Rapid Wall |
| ■ Delta Print & Packaging | ■ Irish Polymers | ■ ReGen Waste |
| ■ Deluxe Group | ■ ISL Waste management | ■ RFD Beaufort |
| ■ Diet Express | ■ J Wilson Agriculture | ■ Richard Atkinson |
| ■ DSV Campbell Freight | ■ James Leckey Design | ■ Rubber and Plastics |
| ■ Dunbia | ■ John Burke & Co | ■ Rutledge Recruitment. |
| ■ Dunore Diagnostic. | ■ John J Doyle. | ■ Salmor Industries |
| ■ Edge | ■ Kerry Foods | ■ Schrader |
| ■ EDS Ireland | ■ Kingspan Renewables | ■ Screenspares Direct |
| ■ Elmgrove Foods | ■ Kiverco | ■ Scruttons |
| ■ Environmental Products and Services, | ■ KMC Engineering | ■ Sepha |
| ■ Eurosprings | ■ Knox & Clayton | ■ Singularity |
| ■ Exclaim | ■ Latens | ■ Smiley Munroe |
| ■ Exmac. | ■ Liddell Linens | ■ Spence Bryson |
| ■ Fane Valley Co-operative Society | ■ Linden Foods | ■ Sports Crest |
| ■ Fast Engineering | ■ Linwoods | ■ Synergy Learning |
| ■ Fayrefield Foods | ■ Lowe Refrigeration | ■ Taskmaestro |
| ■ Fern Computer | ■ Mackle Pet Foods | ■ Tayto |
| ■ Finisco | ■ MacNabb | ■ Team Air Power |
| ■ Finrone | ■ Mallaghan | ■ Team Industries |
| ■ Fintec, | ■ Marlborough Engineering | ■ Telestack |
| ■ Fleming Agri | ■ McCloskey | ■ Texthelp Systems |
| ■ Fiite Software NI | ■ McCord Machinery | ■ The Creativity Hub |
| ■ FM Environmental | ■ McCrory Engineering | ■ Thermomax |
| ■ Foyle Language School | ■ Mindready Solutions | ■ Thompson Aerospace |
| ■ FSL. | ■ Mivan | ■ Thompson Solutions |
| ■ General Cabins | ■ MJM Marine | ■ TOM |
| ■ Glanbia Cheese | ■ Mobile Cohesion | ■ TR Group |
| ■ Glentronics | ■ Moon and Spoon | ■ Tractomatic |
| ■ Glover Site Investigations | ■ Moneymore Supplies | ■ Tughan Solicitors |
| ■ Grafton | ■ Moy Park | ■ Turkington Engineering |
| ■ Greenfields Ireland | ■ Munster Simms | ■ Ulster Carpets |
| ■ Grosvenor Shirts | ■ MWM. | ■ Ulster Pork and Bacon Forum |
| ■ H Ireland | ■ Nacelle Systems | ■ Ulster Weavers Apparel |
| ■ Hackett Hall McKnight | ■ Neil Mathew Architects | ■ Ulster Weavers Home Fashions |
| | ■ NI Chamber | ■ University of Ulster |
| | ■ NI Space | ■ Urban Forest. |

- Valpar
- Visual Edge
- Vion
- Waste Beater
- Watts and Stone
- Wellington IT
- Whale
- White's Speedicook
- Wombat
- Woodwin Catering
- Wrightbus

Tourism Development Scheme: Grants

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many applications for Tourism Development Scheme (TDS) grants submitted by each local council, in the last two years, have been (i) placed on a reserve list to be re-assessed should additional capital funding become available to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board; and (ii) how many applications have been unsuccessful and will not be further assessed.

(AQW 18024/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) A total of 6 applications from local councils have been placed on the reserve list over the last two years.
- (ii) A total of 5 applications from local councils were unsuccessful over the last 2 years.

A summary of the district council areas is shown in the table below.

District Council Area	Reserve List	Unsuccessful
Antrim	-	-
Ards	-	-
Armagh		3
Ballymena	-	1
Ballymoney		-
Banbridge	-	-
Belfast	1	-
Carrickfergus	-	-
Castlereagh	-	-
Coleraine	1	-
Cookstown	-	-
Craigavon	-	-
Londonderry	-	-
Down	-	-
Dungannon	2	-
Fermanagh	-	1
Larne	-	-
Limavady	1	-
Lisburn	-	-
Magherafelt	-	-
Moyle	-	-
Newry & Mourne	-	-
Newtownabbey	-	-
North Down	-	-
Omagh	-	-
Strabane	1	-
Total	6	5

Tamboran Resources

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment why her Department failed to announce that (i) Tamboran Resources intended to operate outside its petroleum licence when it was first made aware of this; and (ii) that it intended to permit Tamboran Resources to operate outside these conditions when it made this decision.

(AQW 18033/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The issue, to which the Member refers, is a technical variation to the Work Programme of a Petroleum Licence. My Department does not routinely make announcements about amendments to the detailed nature of exploration work programmes.

The variation proposed by Tamboran Resources was assessed by officials in my Department who concluded that the proposal was technically sound and did not alter the purpose of the drilling which is to obtain and analyse rock core.

Prior to any drilling taking place, Tamboran Resources will be required to submit an application to my Department for consent to drill, at which stage the exact details of the proposed borehole will be examined and assessed. Only once all the relevant consents and planning permits are in place, will the company be able to proceed.

Tourism: Accommodation Rating

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail the number of tourist premises that have registered for the Tourist Accommodation Ratings system since its inception in 2011.

(AQW 18061/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Since its inception in 2011, 732 premises have joined NITB's tourist accommodation rating system, a break-down of which by category of tourist accommodation is as follows:

- 96 Hotels;
- 51 Guest Houses;
- 43 Bed and Breakfasts;
- 4 Guest Accommodation premises; and
- 538 Self Catering.

Tourism: Ratings System

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment how many tourist premises registered for the general Northern Ireland Tourist Board ratings system in the 5 years up to 2011.

(AQW 18062/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The number of tourist premises which joined NITB's tourist accommodation rating system in the five years up to 2011 is as follows:

Up to 2011, only hotels, guest houses and self catering premises were able to join NITB's rating system. In 2010 there were 1,214 rated premises, a break-down of which by category of tourist accommodation, is as follows:

- 112 Hotels;
- 105 Guest Houses; and
- 997 Self Catering.

In 2009 there were 1,138 star rated premises as follows:

- 111 Hotels;
- 108 Guest Houses; and
- 919 Self Catering.

There are no records of the number of star rated guest houses and self catering prior to 2009. In 2008, there were 113 Hotels. In 2007, there were 115 Hotels. In 2006, there were 115 Hotels.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment what discussions she has had with the Energy Secretary regarding hydraulic fracturing for shale gas.

(AQW 18066/11-15)

Mrs Foster: I have not had any direct discussions with the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change regarding hydraulic fracturing for shale gas. Officials in my Department are in regular contact with their counterparts in the Department of Energy and Climate Change on this subject and they keep me informed of developments in this area.

Hydraulic Fracturing

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment for her assessment of the lifting of the ban on hydraulic fracturing for shale gas by the Energy Secretary and the ramifications of this for Northern Ireland
(AQW 18069/11-15)

Mrs Foster: A moratorium on hydraulic fracturing in Great Britain was agreed between the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the operator, Cuadrilla Resources, pending an investigation into a series of small earthquakes associated with the company's hydraulic fracturing operations in their Preese Hall exploration well. Following the publication of a report by DECC's panel of independent experts, and the results of a subsequent public consultation, DECC has concluded that it is safe for Cuadrilla to resume hydraulic fracturing operations in their exploration programme.

I welcome the announcement made by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change on 13 December 2012 regarding the introduction of a new control system designed to reduce the risks from induced seismicity and to minimise disturbance to those living and working nearby.

As far as Northern Ireland is concerned, should an application to carry out hydraulic fracturing be made, it will be assessed on its individual merit, taking into account the details of the proposed methodology and the specific characteristics of the area, including the geology and hydrogeology.

Shale Gas: Tax Incentives

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline the potential benefits from the tax incentives for the exploitation of reserves of shale gas as outlined in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Autumn statement.
(AQW 18071/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Any new tax incentives have the potential to attract greater investment into the shale gas sector in the UK. However, it is impossible to predict what the effects might be on the exploitation of shale gas reserves ahead of the outcome from the government's recently announced consultation on the fiscal regime for shale gas.

Shale Gas: Impact Study

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to outline what involvement her Department will have in the study commissioned by the Energy Secretary to assess the possible impacts of shale gas extraction on greenhouse gas emissions
(AQW 18073/11-15)

Mrs Foster: The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, in his statement of 13 December, announced his intention to commission a study into the possible impacts of shale gas extraction on greenhouse gas emissions. He has invited Professor David Mackay, DECC's Chief Scientific Adviser and Dr Tim Stone, the Expert Chair of the Office of Nuclear Development to undertake the study.

At this stage no further information is available about the scope of the study or the involvement of other organisations. My Department will, of course, take a close interest in the progress and results of this study.

Invest NI: Properties

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail all the properties and land owned by Invest NI including (i) location; (ii) date acquired; (iii) purpose of acquisition; and (iv) approximate current value.
(AQW 18075/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI's land is acquired and held in support of economic development projects brought forward by qualifying businesses with an approved business case and immediate property need.

Invest NI employs a long term strategy in respect of its land and property holdings and does not hold land or properties in reserve.

The table attached at Annex A provides information in respect of Invest NI's land holding, including location, date acquired and the valuation of the land as at 29th March 2012 as valued by DFP Land & Property Services.

The table attached at Annex B provides information in respect of Invest NI's property holding, including location, date constructed and the valuation of the property as at 29th March 2012 as valued by DFP Land & Property Services.

Annex A

Estate/Business Park	Town/City	Date Acquired	Valuation as at 29/3/12
Aghanloo (East & West)	Limavady	1968/1994	645,000
Antrim Technology Park	Antrim	1985	2,165,000
Balloo South Business Park	Bangor	1974-1976	2,532,500

Estate/Business Park	Town/City	Date Acquired	Valuation as at 29/3/12
Global Point Business Park	Newtownabbey	1970-1972/1995	9,150,000
Ballyreagh Business Park	Cookstown	1995	585,000
Campsie	Londonderry	1971-1975/1996	3,000,000
Carnbane Business Park	Newry	1996-1997/2010	7,875,000
Charlestown	Craigavon	1992	2,450,000
Craigavon Food Park	Craigavon	1982-1985	1,142,500
Creagh Business Park	Magherafelt	2001	2,505,000
Carran Business Park	Enniskillen	1996-1997	1,440,000
Ballyharry Business Park	Newtownards	1995	532,500
Doogary (East & West)	Omagh	1994	430,000
Down Business Park	Downpatrick	1998	1,715,000
Dungannon Business Park	Dungannon	2002-2004	4,220,000
Edenaveys	Armagh	1995/2009	1,235,000
Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	1982/1991	305,000
Glenbank Business Park	Belfast	1998	200,000
Hightown	Mallusk	1966-1975	1,520,000
Killough Road	Downpatrick	1974	720,000
Knockmore	Lisburn	1971	1,445,000
Lackaghboy	Enniskillen	1974	845,000
Leyland Road	Ballycastle	1996	90,000
Lissue	Lisburn	1971-1974	450,000
Mandeville	Craigavon	1996	3,825,000
Maydown	Londonderry	1957	950,000
Milbrook	Larne	1969	320,000
Orchard Road	Strabane	1995	42,500
Halfpenny Valley	Craigavon	1996	2,600,000
Silverwood	Lurgan	1975-1976/ 1981-1982	55,000
Skeoge	Londonderry	1994-1995	2,615,000
Springbank	Belfast	1981/1992/1998	1,185,000
Strabane	Strabane	2010	2,145,000
Forthriver Business Park	Belfast	2001	1,525,000
Springvale	Belfast	1995-1998	250,000
Trooperslane	Carrickfergus	1973-1975	1,165,000
Wattstown	Coleraine	1974	3,360,000
Whiterock	Belfast	1972	315,000
Woodside Road (East and West)	Ballymena	1980	1,330,000

Annex B

Building	Town/City	Date Constructed	Valuation as at 29/3/12
ATP Unit 11	Antrim	1987	2,635,000
ATP Unit 1	Antrim	1986	485,000
ATP Unit 10	Antrim	1990	985,000
ATP Unit 5	Antrim	1989	550,000
Factory at Glen Road	Belfast	1991	425,000
ATP Unit 2	Antrim	1986	432,500
ATP Unit 3	Antrim	1987	470,000
ATP Unit 4	Antrim	1988	505,000
ATP Unit 6	Antrim	1990	457,500
ATP Unit 7	Antrim	1990	657,500
Factory No. 3 at Ballygomartin	Belfast	1996	550,000
Factory at Springbank	Belfast	1998	765,000
Factory at Springvale	Belfast	1998	2,050,000
Factory at Duncairn Gardens	Belfast	1998	1,525,000
Whiterock Business Centre	Belfast	2001	950,000
Glenbank Business Centre	Belfast	2003	775,000
Factory at Down Business Park	Downpatrick	2003	315,000
10 Lissue Road Lisburn	Lisburn	1971-1974	100,000

Invest NI: Vacant Land

Mrs Overend asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, with regard to all the currently vacant land and properties owned by InvestNI, to detail (i) the length of time each has been vacant; (ii) the potential annual rental income of each; (iii) whether InvestNI has any immediate plans to utilise them in the future; and (iv) whether her Department would consider transferring any vacant properties to local community/business groups.

(AQW 18077/11-15)

Mrs Foster: Invest NI holds c2838 acres of land across Northern Ireland with c749 acres available in support of economic development projects brought forward by qualifying businesses. Invest NI currently has no vacant properties in its ownership.

Invest NI lands are developed as industrial estates/business parks. Of these lands there are 5 estates currently totally vacant which includes 1 being developed. The remainder are occupied either in part or in full.

Annex A details all Invest NI land holdings, the amount of available land and the length of time each has been vacant. Invest NI property is valued by DFP's Land and Property Services. Industrial estates/business parks are valued quarterly on a per acre basis for an industrial use. This information is also included at Annex A.

All Invest NI land and property is held in support of economic development and is proactively marketed to both foreign and indigenous investors, although the final decision on location rests with the investor.

Invest NI, in accordance with Department of Finance and Personnel guidelines, keeps its landholding under continual review.

Any lands deemed surplus to requirements would be considered for disposal as per the 'Disposal of Surplus Public Sector Property in Northern Ireland' guidelines as issued by DFP Land & Property Services (LPS)/Central Advisory Unit (CAU).

http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/lps/index/property_valuation/valuation-public-sector-bodies/disposal_of_surplus_public_sector_property.htm

Annex A

Industrial Estate	Town/City	Date Acquired	Length of Time Vacant	Landholding (acres)	Available land (acres)	125 Year Lease Rent Per Annum (per acre)*	999 Year Lease Premium (per acre)*
Mandeville**	Craigavon	1996	Since Acquisition	99.00	97.20	4,400	55,000
Global Point BP	Newtown-abbey	1970-1972/1995	Since Acquisition	149.72	91.09	11,250	125,000
Campsie IE	Londonderry	1971-1975/1996	Partially Occupied	244.52	61.00	5,600	70,000
Wattstown BP	Coleraine	1974	Partially Occupied	74.19	48.80	7,600	95,000
Halfpenny Valley IE	Lurgan	1996	Partially Occupied	60.37	44.70	5,500	70,000
Skeoge IP	Londonderry	1994-1995	Partially Occupied	75.18	32.40	6,000	75,000
Down BP	Downpatrick	1998	Partially Occupied	81.87	32.10	5,400	67,500
Woodside Road East and West IE	Ballymena	1980	Partially Occupied	80.52	29.23	5,200	65,000
Dungannon B Park***	Dungannon	2002-2004	Since Acquisition	40.287	28.5	10,000	125,000
Antrim Technology Park	Antrim	1985	Partially Occupied	75.13	26.50	6,000	75,000
Charlestown Road IE	Portadown	1992	Partially Occupied	60.16	22.30	7,600	95,000
Carran	Enniskillen	1996-1997	Partially Occupied	65.50	21.60	4,800	60,000
Balloo South	Bangor	1974-1976	Partially Occupied	51.17	20.10	8,400	105,000
Creagh	Toome	2001	Partially Occupied	54.20	19.90	7,600	95,000
Killough Road	Downpatrick	1974	Partially Occupied	28.63	18.80	3,000	37,500
Trooperslane	Carrickfergus	1973-1975	Partially Occupied	108.06	18.80	4,400	55,000
Lackaghboy	Enniskillen	1974	Partially Occupied	57.70	14.82	4,000	50,000
Springbank	Belfast	1981/1992/1998	Partially Occupied	76.18	13.50	5,650	70,000
Aghanloo (East & West)	Limavady	1968/1994	Partially Occupied	51.34	16.5	2,400	30,000
Craigavon Food Park	Portadown	1982-1985	Partially Occupied	43.36	13.00	6,000	75,000
Forthriver	Belfast	2001	Since Acquisition	23.08	12.70	8,000	100,000
Maydown	Londonderry	1957	Partially Occupied	66.34	11.07	5,600	70,000

Industrial Estate	Town/City	Date Acquired	Length of Time Vacant	Landholding (acres)	Available land (acres)	125 Year Lease Rent Per Annum (per acre)*	999 Year Lease Premium (per acre)*
Knockmore Hill	Lisburn	1971	Partially Occupied	75.00	8.20	10,800	135,000
Edenaveys Business Park	Armagh	1995/2009	Partially Occupied	24.00	7.00	7,600	95,000
Hightown	Mallusk	1966-1975	Partially Occupied	127.76	6.30	15,500	195,000
Ballyreagh	Cookstown	1995	Partially Occupied	31.33	5.14	7,600	95,000
Doogary	Omagh	1994	Partially Occupied	46.79	4.80	5,600	70,000
Millbrook	Larne	1969	Partially Occupied	34.37	4.70	4,800	60,000
Garryduff Road	Ballymoney	1982/1991	Partially Occupied	12.75	4.50	4,400	55,000
Ballyharry Business Park	Newtownards	1995	Partially Occupied	21.40	4.10	7,250	90,000
Glenbank	Belfast	1998	Partially Occupied	11.06	2.90	4,000	50,000
Whiterock	Belfast	1972	Partially Occupied	12.13	2.58	5,500	70,000
Springvale	Belfast	1995-1998	Partially Occupied	47.91	2.10	10,500	130,000
Leyland Road	Ballycastle	1996	Partially Occupied	4.90	2.00	2,400	30,000
Silverwood	Lurgan	1975-1976/1981-1982	Partially Occupied	44.12	0.50	5,500	70,000
Carnbane Business**** Park	Newry	1996-1997/2010	Partially Occupied	138.24	0.00	13,250	165,000
Strabane B Park*****	Strabane	2010	Since Acquisition	43.10	0.00	6,000	75,000
Fully Developed & Fully Occupied Estates	Various	Various	Fully developed and occupied	496.89	0.00	n/a	n/a
Totals				2838.29	749.43		

* Figures correct as at 1st September 2012 as advised by DFP Land & Property Services and based on industrial use.

** Initial infrastructure works completed in 2009 and the site is being proactively marketed

*** Development Works completed in 2009 and is currently subject to 9 interests

**** Extension lands acquired in 2010 with Phase 1 development works due to complete Spring 2013 and the site is being proactively marketed

***** Development works are due to complete early 2013 and is currently subject to 7 interests

Titanic Signature Project

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (i) to provide the most up to date numbers on visitors to the Titanic Signature Project, broken down into visitors from Northern Ireland and from outside Northern Ireland; and (ii) how this compares with projected figures.

(AQW 18091/11-15)

Mrs Foster:

- (i) Titanic Belfast has attracted 621,829 visitors by the end of November with 220,496 (35.51%) from Northern Ireland and 401,333 originating from outside Northern Ireland, representative of 64.49% of the total visitor number.
- (ii) Annual projected visitor numbers were forecast to be 395,000 in 2012 and between 363,000 and 376,000 thereafter.

Hydroelectric Power

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment to detail what percentage of electricity is generated by hydro power.

(AQW 18092/11-15)

Mrs Foster: In the twelve months to 31 October 2012, electricity generated from hydro power accounted for 0.85% of all electricity generated from renewable sources and 0.12% of total electricity generation.

Department of the Environment

Drumclay Crannóg: Excavation Work

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the discussions he has had with the Minister of Finance and Personnel and the Minister for Regional Development on securing agreement to complete the excavation work at the Drumclay Crannóg.

(AQW 17670/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): I acted decisively both in putting an exclusion zone around the crannóg and in allowing time for the excavation of the site. This has been recognised far and wide. The excavation is a once in a hundred year opportunity and this work will reshape understanding, nationally and internationally, of such settlements and the lives of their inhabitants, stretching back over 1000 years.

My office and that of Minister Kennedy have worked well in managing the situation that evolved. In my view, there are lessons to be drawn in terms of archaeological excavation and heritage for the future, but there have been good practice and good outcomes over the last number of months because of the DRD/DOE liaison.

I have announced that the excavation of the crannóg is to be extended to the end of March 2013.

Planning: Enforcement Staff

Mr Wells asked the Minister of the Environment whether enforcement staff working in planning offices are permitted to resign from their posts and commence employment with developers that they were taking action against a few days earlier.

(AQW 17767/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The NICS HR Handbook sets out that within two years of leaving the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS), Civil Servants must obtain Departmental approval before taking any form of full, part-time or fee-paid employment.

However, legal advice is that the NICS Human Resources Handbook assumes that when an officer resigns from the NICS, the individual reports the job offer to the Department and accepts the restrictions within the NICS Human Resources Handbook. This is important given that the above condition is enforceable only if agreed by both parties. It is the case that once an officer has left the NICS there is no hold over the individual. Given this, it is uncertain if the above condition is enforceable when an officer has resigned from the NICS.

If a member of staff within the Department decides to resign the Department cannot refuse to accept a letter of resignation.

I have asked for a copy of the legal advice on this matter and will advise further.

Littering

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment to detail the responses he has received to his letter to local councils concerning their lack of action on littering; and what additional action councils are now taking.

(AQW 17795/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The Department wrote to all District Council Chief Executives on 18 October 2012 highlighting the fact that annual fixed penalty notice figures indicate that some Councils are much more proactive than others in taking enforcement action against litter offenders and to ascertain why the figures are as they are.

18 of the 26 Councils responded to the Department, namely Limavady, Larne, Belfast, Newtownabbey, Fermanagh, Coleraine, Magherafelt, Craigavon, Antrim, Ballymoney, Ballymena, Dungannon, Cookstown, Omagh, Lisburn, North Down, Moyle and Carrickfergus. Detailed and informative responses were received from many of these Councils. The following table provides details of key points made by each Council. The table also provides details of additional action by the Councils.

Council	Litter Fines Issued 2011/12	Extracts/summaries of key points made by Councils
Antrim	30	Strongly committed to a policy of robust enforcement and environmental education programmes. A small number of complaints are received concerning cleanliness issues and Council is of the view that current balanced approach of enforcement and education is appropriate.
Ballymena	30	<p>Employs 2 enforcement wardens covering a wide range of duties, including litter enforcement. Resources for litter related work is carefully targeted to gain maximum benefit. Enforcement is only one arm of the battle against litter proactive work includes community clean-up operations; targeting hot spots to educate rather than criminalise children; to introduce an educational "yellow card" scheme to be followed by a fine for reoffending.</p> <p>Additional action: currently exploring the possibility of identifying sufficient funding to allow a dedicated resource to be put in place.</p>
Ballymoney	4	The approach taken as regards litter enforcement is proportionate to the "problem" within the Borough and available resources are targeted to need in light of intelligence obtained from a number of sources...The use of fixed penalty notices is but one approach to addressing the litter issue and its use within this Borough reflects that fact.
Belfast	1534	<p>....there is a dedicated enforcement team consisting of Enforcement Officers and Litter Wardens. The Enforcement Officers are based in districts throughout the city and have a remit covering domestic and commercial waste, littering, graffiti and fly-posting. The Litter Wardens are based in the city centre and detect littering and fly-posting offences. One of the Council's key service performance outputs is to determine an annual target in respect of the number of fixed penalty notices issued for littering in a financial year.</p> <p>Additional action: The target for fixed penalty notices in 2012/13 is 2000.</p>
Carrickfergus	19	<p>...recently undergone a number of staff changes within the Pollution Control Team which has impacted on ability to undertake litter patrols.</p> <p>Additional action: Developing a litter and dog fouling strategy aimed at looking at how the Council can better target its resources in order to address this type of low level environmental crime. The Council recently committed to recruiting a second Enforcement Officer to educate the public in order to improve the environmental quality of the Borough and to increase the number of fixed penalties issued by Council. Targets are to be set for the issuing of fixed penalty notices. Enforcement Officers will undertake a wide range of duties including litter enforcement. Litter enforcement is being taken seriously by the Council and it is anticipated that there will be a reduction in litter and fouling complaints and resultant improvements in environmental quality through greater numbers of fixed penalty notices being issued in 2013.</p>
Coleraine	16	<p>Employs 2 enforcement wardens undertaking a wide range of duties including litter enforcement. Zero tolerance policy for litter offenders over the age of 18. Figures for 2011/12 were down due to long term sickness of one of the enforcement wardens. The Council's Environment Officer concentrates on education within schools, youth groups and community groups promoting anti litter and coastal awareness.</p> <p>Additional action: will be reviewing work procedures to adopt a more proactive approach in taking enforcement action against litter offenders.</p>

Council	Litter Fines Issued 2011/12	Extracts/summaries of key points made by Councils
Cookstown	12	The Council does not have any dedicated litter wardens, however, all officers are authorised for the purposes of Clean Neighbourhoods legislation and the Litter Order. The Council takes a zero tolerance approach to all littering offences that are detected. Council is of the view that a proactive and robust enforcement mechanism must be in place to ensure that the regulatory message is clear and succinct. The Council has been proactive in taking forward its Clean Neighbourhoods Programme which focuses on education, community engagement and regulation.
Craigavon	1046	The Council takes a zero tolerance approach to litter throughout the Borough. It employs 4 environmental wardens to help to address the litter problem. Additional action: currently looking at the possibility of appointing another warden in the next financial year.
Dungannon & South Tyrone	1	The Council does not have a written litter strategy. All complaints received are investigated and action taken as appropriate in each individual case. The Council does not employ litter wardens and as a result any action in respect of litter is dependent on Environmental Health Officers being a witness to the offence. The pressures on current resources are also likely to have had an impact on the level of fixed penalties served.
Fermanagh	8	The Council believes that a major contributory factor to the success in the cleanliness of our streets is the Council's initiative where orderlies have responsibility for a range of duties in all our towns, villages and hamlets. Each, generally living in his/her own area, develops a sense of pride and ownership, which is rarely adopted by those remote from their area. The issue of fixed penalties is not the only method of changing attitudes to litteringThe Council has adopted an approach whereby the natural environment is improved, good facilities provided and users educated in responsible behaviour. Additional action: will continue to monitor the effectiveness of the entire initiative going forward.
Larne	23	The Council takes a proactive and robust approach to enforcement and whilst the number of fixed penalty notices issued in 2011/12 reduced considerably from the previous 2 years, this was a result of the long-term absence of a member of staff.
Limavady	4	The Council employs one Enforcement Officer who is also responsible for a wide range of duties and therefore the resources to proactively patrol the Borough to detect litter offences is restricted. The Council has always taken a consistent approach in dealing with litter offences. Complaints are always investigated thoroughly and if there is sufficient evidence a fixed penalty notice will be issued. Additional action: the Council is in the process of developing a litter enforcement policy.
Lisburn	42	The Council does not have any litter wardens and instead it utilises staff that are authorised under the legislation to issue fixed penalty notices in addition to their other duties. Any comparison between councils is skewed by the scale of the resources dedicated to this areaLisburn City Council has achieved a commendable performance with the resources available to us. While the increased level of fine may act as more of a deterrent against offending, the additional income generated is insignificant when compared to the cost of employing dedicated litter wardens...
Magherafelt	40	The Council administers the issuing of fixed penalty notices for litter through its enforcement officer whose duties cover a wide range of issues in addition to litter enforcement. The Council targets areas where litter has been reported as an issue and has been more proactive since the introduction of the Clean Neighbourhoods legislation. Additional action: during the 6 month period (April to September 2012) it issued 38 fixed penalty notices for litter which is a significant pro rata increase on previous years.

Council	Litter Fines Issued 2011/12	Extracts/summaries of key points made by Councils
Moyle	5	The Council takes the issue of litter enforcement very seriously and regular patrols to detect littering offenders are carried out. Fixed penalty notices are issued in all cases where littering offences are detected. The Council has the smallest population in Northern Ireland and this is reflected in the number of fixed penalties issued.
Newtownabbey	150	The Council employs 2.5 full time employment enforcement officers. It carries out all enforcement activities in line with its Enforcement Policy. The Council believes in firm but fair regulation. The number of fixed penalty notices issued does not reflect the level of educational initiatives undertaken by the Council to curb littering. Additional action: the Enforcement Policy is reviewed every 2 years to ensure that it remains relevant to new legislation for which the Council has enforcement responsibilities.
North Down	4	While the actual number of fixed penalty fines issued is low, it does not necessarily indicate that this Borough is strewn with litter. The Council has a firm, responsible and fair approach to dealing with those who litter and approaches this through education, appropriate street cleaning and enforcement. The Council undertakes limited targeted patrols in the Borough to detect littering offences. The Council does not have the resources to employ specific litter wardens unlike other Councils such as Belfast and Craigavon. The Council Enforcement Officers have a demanding workload and deal with a wide range of issues, including littering.
Omagh	24	The Council employs 1 litter warden who patrols the district to enforce Council policy regarding litter abatement. The figures for 2011/12 are down from the previous year and this is attributed to a more rigorous awareness campaign. The litter warden also issues formal warnings and carries out an education programme with the local schools.
Ards	12	No response
Armagh City & District	14	No response
Banbridge	12	No response
Castlereagh	26	No response
Derry	41	No response
Strabane	22	No response

It is disappointing that 6 Councils did not respond to this exercise. However, the information received so far helps to put the figures from Councils into a local context, and factors such as the employment of dedicated litter wardens would appear to equate to a more proactive enforcement policy with higher numbers of fixed penalty notices issued for littering offences.

I am satisfied that Councils take their duties in respect of litter enforcement seriously and other initiatives such as education and awareness have an important role to play. However, evidence of robust enforcement of the anti-litter laws in local neighbourhoods across all of Northern Ireland is necessary in order to send out a clear and consistent message that littering will not be tolerated, it is an offence to drop litter and those who commit that offence are likely to be fined, and if fines are not paid offenders will face prosecution in the Courts. I am not satisfied that this is the message which has applied in some Council districts over recent years in view of the very small numbers of fines actually issued in those districts. Litter fines are a valuable and effective deterrent and there is clearly room for improvement in their use to tackle littering in some Council districts.

I will therefore be carrying out a further assessment of the overall Northern Ireland situation after the end of this financial year by which time I would expect to see some improvements.

There is already some evidence of a more proactive and focussed approach being adopted in some Council districts in view of the additional action highlighted in the above table. For example, the challenging targets set by Belfast City Council, interim results from Magherafelt for the first 6 months of this financial year, significant plans to take effect in Carrickfergus, the possibility of a dedicated resource in Ballymena and an additional enforcement officer in Craigavon and the development of a litter enforcement policy in Limavady. I also note that reviews are taking place in Coleraine, Newtownabbey and Fermanagh. These are all encouraging developments and I am hopeful that my next assessment of the situation after the end of this financial year will provide further evidence of more effective action against littering offenders.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of the Environment for an estimate of the number of new homes that will be required for North Down as part of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan.

(AQW 17956/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The adopted version of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan will set out the Department's conclusions on the number of new houses required for North Down. I am currently working closely with officials to finalise the plan policies and proposals. The Department is currently assessing the recommendations contained within the Planning Appeals Commission's reports which were produced following the Public Inquiry.

It would be inappropriate to release the figures you requested ahead of the publication of the adopted plan.

High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment how many complaints about high hedges have been (i) lodged; and (ii) dealt with by councils since the law came into effect.

(AQW 18043/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The High Hedges Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 became operational on 31 March 2012 and responsibility for its implementation transferred to District Councils from that date. My Department intends to review this legislation within two years of its commencement. The High Hedges Act has only been operational for 8 months. I will wait a further period before collating statistics.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Final Report

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether the final Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan report and proposals will be subject to Ministerial approval.

(AQW 18057/11-15)

Mr Attwood: I am currently working closely with my officials to ensure that adoption of the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan is completed by the end of March 2013. The published reports and proposals will be subject to Ministerial approval.

Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan: Amendments

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment whether the final Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan proposals can be amended by his Department.

(AQW 18058/11-15)

Mr Attwood: Any development plan adopted by my Department, including the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan which I intend to adopt by the end of March 2013, may be subject to alteration through the statutory process.

Development Limits: Bangor and Crawfordsburn

Mr Weir asked the Minister of the Environment what steps his Department is taking to ensure the protection of development limits between Bangor and Crawfordsburn in order to maintain the integrity of both.

(AQW 18059/11-15)

Mr Attwood: The development limits for Bangor and Crawfordsburn and the setting of the 2 settlements are matters for planning policies and proposals contained in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP).

I am working closely with my officials on the adoption process for this development plan which is scheduled for completion by the end of March 2013.

The planning matters above are being fully and carefully examined during the Department's consideration of the recommendations made by the Planning Appeals Commission following the BMAP Public Inquiry.

Social Housing: One- and Two-bedroom Units

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of the Environment whether there has been an increase in planning applications for new social housing schemes, especially of one and two bedroom properties, in advance of the introduction of Welfare Reform.

(AQW 18095/11-15)

Mr Attwood: In advance of the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill I can advise that there has been no increase in planning applications received for new social housing schemes.

Comparing April-June of 2012 with the same period last year indicates that there has been a reduction of 1 planning application received. In the 2011/12 business year a total of 47 applications for social housing were received. The majority of these applications related to two and three bedroom properties.

I believe that this question is very important. The London Government does not acknowledge fully and certainly does not act in relation to the small number of one bedroom properties that exist in the NI social housing sector, the historic reasons why

there is a large number of 2, 3 and 4 bedroom properties and how the 'bedroom tax' under welfare reform will have such a disproportionate and adverse impact here.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Special EU Programmes Body: Peace III Projects

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 17093/11-15, (i) to list the additional projects with a value over £17m which have been approved by the PEACE III Steering Committee; (ii) when letters of offer will issue; and (iii) whether there will be sufficient time to complete projects without the risk of incurring penalties and loss of funding.

(AQW 17941/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): Since answering AQW 17093/11-15, one of the additional projects, Inner City Trust's City Centre Garden of Reflection, has been issued with a Letter of Offer to the value of £2,129,978. The value of the Letter of Offer is a reduction from £2,579,070 which had earlier been proposed.

Two further projects approved by Steering Committee under PEACE III Theme 2.1 are awaiting the approval of the relevant accountable government departments prior to the issue of Letters of Offer. These are detailed in the table below.

Lead Partner	Project Name	Value
Belfast City Council	The Girdwood Community Hub	£9,597,370.00
Donegal County Council	Reconciliation Through The Riverine	£4,853,798.40
Total		£14,451,168.40

The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is aware of the challenges faced by projects to complete their aims and objectives within the lifetime of the PEACE III Programme. Project Lead Partners are required to have a viable implementation plan in place at the time the Letter of Offer is issued that demonstrates that the project can be implemented within the PEACE III Programme timescales.

Net Fiscal Balance Reports

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail in full the calculation used to estimate the share of corporation tax in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, including references to the source data.

(AQW 17994/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I previously outlined the methodology used in the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11 to estimate Northern Ireland's share of corporation tax in my response to your Assembly question AQW 17382/11-15 where I indicated that the Report's corporation tax estimate has been produced in line with GERS methodology by apportioning a share of UK corporation tax receipts on the basis of Northern Ireland's share of UK profits.

As stated in Annex B of the report, the UK figure for total corporation tax is taken from the PSAT2 databank published by ONS. The estimate of NI corporation tax excludes North Sea corporation tax payments and these are deducted using data from tables on corporation tax published on the HMRC website. Information on profits (less holding gains) is directly supplied by ONS.

I must re-emphasise again that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Garden of Remembrance: Stormont Estate

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, given the approach of the centenary of The Great War and the Battle of the Somme, whether he will make arrangements for a permanent Garden of Remembrance, or other suitable memorial, in the Stormont Estate to commemorate citizens from Northern Ireland who fell in the 1914/18 War and subsequent conflicts, including the victims of terrorism.

(AQW 18031/11-15)

Mr Wilson: There are two existing commemorative areas on the Stormont Estate which reflect on conflict, one of which relates specifically to the Battle of the Somme.

There are no plans for the creation of a further memorial.

Rate Relief: Vacant Industrial Buildings

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the rate relief that is available to the business sector for vacant industrial buildings.

(AQW 18045/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Rates (Unoccupied Hereditaments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011 which deal with the rating of empty properties state that a property can be excluded from vacant rating liability when it is a qualifying industrial property.

The definition of a qualifying industrial property is:

“Any hereditament other than a retail hereditament in relation to which all buildings comprised in the hereditament are constructed or adapted

(a) in the course of a trade or business; and

(b) for one or more of the following purposes, or one or more such purposes and one or more purposes ancillary thereto—

(i) the manufacture, repair or adaptation of goods or materials;

(ii) the working or processing of minerals;

(iii) the generation of electricity.”

In Northern Ireland, it is worth noting that aside from this exemption, empty property rate relief of 50% applies here for non industrial buildings, so 50% rates are levied. This compares to the 100% charge in England and Wales for all commercial properties.

Peace III: Funding

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total funding that has been committed to (i) Priority sub-Measure 1.1: - Building positive relations at the local level; (ii) Priority sub-Measure 1.2: - Acknowledging the past; (iii) Priority sub-Measure 2.1: - Creating shared public spaces; (iv) Priority sub-Measure 2.2: - Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society; and (v) Priority 3: - Technical Assistance.

(AQW 18096/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below details commitment under each Theme of the PEACE III Programme as at 30 November 2012.

Theme	Overall Budget (£)	Total Commitment To Date (£)
1.1	112,734,640	112,837,034
1.2	40,000,000	34,291,896
2.1	65,600,000	64,220,736
2.2	32,000,000	29,417,611
3.1	15,978,806	13,802,119
Total	266,313,446	254,569,396

Commitment includes all projects which have accepted Letters of Offer, projects with Letters of Offer issued, and all completed projects. Projects which have been approved by Steering Committee but which have not yet been issued with a Letter of Offer have not been included.

Peace III: Expenditure

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the total actual expenditure to date on (i) Priority sub-Measure 1.1: - Building positive relations at the local level; (ii) Priority sub-Measure 1.2: - Acknowledging the past; (iii) Priority sub-Measure 2.1: - Creating shared public spaces; (iv) Priority sub-Measure 2.2: - Key institutional capacities are developed for a shared society; and (v) Priority 3: - Technical Assistance.

(AQW 18097/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table below presents the expenditure at 30 November 2012 under each Theme of the PEACE III Programme, along with the budget available under each Theme.

Theme	Overall Budget (£)	Total Expenditure To Date (£)
1.1	112,734,640	65,376,845
1.2	40,000,000	18,486,653
2.1	65,600,000	23,696,376
2.2	32,000,000	4,895,458

Theme	Overall Budget (£)	Total Expenditure To Date (£)
3.1	15,978,806	9,358,657
Total	266,313,446	121,813,989

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Psychiatric Nurses

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail how many psychiatric nurses are currently in training broken down by gender.

(AQW 18081/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The University of Ulster has confirmed that for the academic Year 2012/13 there are a total of 104 females and 26 males studying Nursing Mental Health in Years one, two and three.

Queens University, Belfast, School of Nursing has advised that the detailed information requested is unavailable at this time and will be forwarded to the Department in the New Year. My officials will provide this to you in due course.

Cataract Operations: Number

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many cataract operations have been carried out in the last year in (i) Lagan Valley Hospital; (ii) Mater Hospital; (iii) Royal Victoria Hospital; and (iv) Northern Ireland.

(AQW 18143/11-15)

Mr Poots: The number of cataract operations carried out in 2011/12 in Lagan Valley Hospital, Mater Hospital, Royal Victoria Hospital and in all HSC Hospitals in Northern Ireland, are displayed in the table below.

Hospital	Cataract Operations
Lagan Valley	956
Mater	3,049
Royal Victoria	1,235
Northern Ireland*	7,951

Source: Hospital Inpatient System

*Includes Lagan Valley Hospital, Mater Hospital and Royal Victoria Hospital.

Cataract Operations: Waiting Time

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what is the average waiting time for a cataract operation in (i) Lagan Valley Hospital; (ii) Mater Hospital; (iii) Royal Victoria Hospital; and (iv) Northern Ireland.

(AQW 18144/11-15)

Mr Poots: The average number of weeks waiting for cataract surgery, at 30th September 2012, the most recent quarter for which official data are available, for each of the specified hospitals, and Northern Ireland as a whole, is detailed in the table below.

	Average Waiting Time (Weeks Waiting)
(i) Lagan Valley	4.7
(ii) Mater	15.1
(iii) Royal Victoria	14.0
(iv) Northern Ireland	13.3

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Department of Justice

Sexual Offences: Case Review

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will instigate a serious case review in the case of John Stanfield to ascertain why he was able to commit further sexual offences on two occasions whilst on probation for sexually assaulting a child.

(AQW 17771/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): I refer the Member to the answer I gave to question 16244/11-15, which applies equally in this case. In addition, this case did not fall within the parameters for multi agency management of risk as set out in paragraph 3.11 of the statutory guidance on the public protection arrangements.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Projects

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail all the Northern Ireland Prison Service projects that consultants are working on which may result in contracts for which their firms could bid.

(AQW 17772/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Business Consultancy Service (BCS) currently provides a consultancy service to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) on the Review of Offender Management Administrative Functions Project. BCS is a directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) and the central consulting group within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Consistent with DFP guidance on the classification of professional services, there are no other consultancy services currently being provided to NIPS.

Legal Aid: Costs

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the total Legal Aid costs paid in respect of Barry McCarney including legal firm, junior counsel, senior counsel, expenses and any reports supplied/obtained for his defence.

(AQW 17773/11-15)

Mr Ford: All claims for payment have not yet been submitted as this case is not yet concluded. A sentencing hearing is due to take place on 11 January 2013.

To date, the total amount paid in respect of magistrates' court proceedings is £31,102.97 (including VAT £5,183.83). Of that amount, £329.03 (including £54.84) was paid to counsel.

To date, the total amount paid in respect of the Crown Court trial is £5557.61 (including VAT of 926.27).

Sexual Offenders Prevention Order: Breach

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice what monitoring was in place in the case of 12/134273 (Daryl Geoffrey Kelly), who has been charged with breaching the terms of his Sexual Offenders Prevention Order on 2 April 2012.

(AQW 17775/11-15)

Mr Ford: As this case is still before the courts it would be inappropriate for me to make any comment.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Code of Conduct and Discipline

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 12222/11-15, and numerous answers prior to this in which he states Northern Ireland Prison Service is currently developing a new Professional Code of Conduct and Discipline, can he confirm (i) when this process commenced; (ii) how many people are working on it and from which agencies or bodies in addition to the Northern Ireland Prison Service; and (iii) when is it likely to be completed and operational.

(AQW 17821/11-15)

Mr Ford: The development of a new Code of Conduct and Discipline for the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) commenced several months ago. As I have stated in previous answers, this is a complex piece of work. A range of key stakeholders from NIPS; the Department of Justice; the Department of Finance and Personnel; the Prison Governors' Association; and the Prison Officers' Association are contributing to the process which is being led by a member of NIPS staff.

The new system will become operational when the consultation process with key stakeholders is complete.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Risk Assessments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice pursuant to AQW 16744/11-15 to provide a copy of the Risk Assessment procedure for those who are likely to self harm and to indicate at what level in the Prison Service the risk assessment is carried out.

(AQW 17822/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no specific Northern Ireland Prison Service Risk Assessment procedure, however where a prisoner presents as being at risk of self harm, they will be managed under the Supporting Prisoner at Risk process. Upon referral each prisoner will have an assessment interview which is carried out at Senior Officer level.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Counselling Services

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16983/11-15, in how many individual cases has this been authorised for other prisoners, particularly in the Pre-Release Unit or Prisoner Assessment Unit.
(AQW 17826/11-15)

Mr Ford: There have been no other authorised cases.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16744/11-15, whether prisoners at risk of self harm are always supervised by prison officers specially trained and qualified for the purpose, and to indicate the number of officers in the Northern Ireland Prison Service currently available for such duties.
(AQW 17850/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prison Officers do not have to be specially trained or qualified to supervise prisoners at risk. Supervision of prisoners is an integral part of the role of a prison officer.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff from outside Northern Ireland

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail how many Northern Ireland Prison Service staff are (i) brought in from outside Northern Ireland; (ii) travel in and out of Northern Ireland on a weekly basis and, if so, to detail (a) the cost of travel and accommodation to date; and (b) and the projected final cost.
(AQW 17863/11-15)

Mr Ford: Four Northern Ireland Prison Service staff travel to and from Northern Ireland on a weekly basis. The total cost incurred to date for travel and accommodation is £58,653.88. It is not possible to provide projected final costs due to differing contractual time periods and varying weekly costs.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Staff Training

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16931/11-15 and AQW 16111/11-15; (i) to explain why he is unable to provide a total figure for Northern Ireland Prison Service staff trained; and (ii) whether he will provide an explanation for his previous answer when he stated PAR1 Awareness Sessions were made available to all staff.
(AQW 17869/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prior to the introduction of SPAR training in May 2009, staff training officers provided briefing/awareness sessions on Prisoner at Risk 1(PAR1) with each session lasting approximately two hours. Although these awareness sessions were made available to all staff, attendance at each session was not recorded on the NIPS training database.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Non-natural Deaths in Custody

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16393/11-15, to provide a breakdown of the 15 non-natural deaths that have not been subject to an inquest, including the date of death.
(AQW 17870/11-15)

Mr Ford: Having given due consideration to the families involved, I have not included individual names of the non-natural deaths that have not been subject to an inquest. I have provided the date of death and the establishment where the death occurred or the establishment to which the prisoner was last recorded.

01/08/2008	Maghaberry Prison
29/08/2009	Maghaberry Prison
03/10/2009	PAU
03/08/2010	Hydebank Wood YOC
25/12/2010	Maghaberry Prison
04/05/2011	Hydebank Wood YOC
04/05/2011	Hydebank Wood Prison
22/05/2011	Maghaberry Prison
23/06/2012	Maghaberry Prison

01/08/2008	Maghaberry Prison
31/12/2011	Maghaberry Prison
31/01/2012	Maghaberry Prison
25/06/2012	Maghaberry Prison
08/07/2012	Maghaberry Prison
15/10/2012	Maghaberry Prison
06/11/2012	Maghaberry Prison

Sexual Offences Prevention Order: Breaches

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice whether he will launch an inquiry into the level of Sexual Offences Prevention Order breaches over the last two years to establish how sex-offenders are being monitored, and to develop a more effective way of managing such offenders in the community.

(AQW 17872/11-15)

Mr Ford: A Sexual Offences Prevention Order (SOPO) is a civil order made by the court for the purpose of protecting the public from serious sexual harm from an offender. It is only one of a range of measures which the relevant agencies can use to assist in managing risk in the community.

The order prohibits an individual offender from doing anything described in the order. Breach of those prohibitions is a criminal offence carrying a maximum penalty of five years' imprisonment, with the option for the court to impose an extended sentence for public protection.

Breach of an order is not an indication of sexual reoffending. Breach action is taken when an offender does not adhere to the conditions in the order and is an indication of the effectiveness of enforcement by the agencies. I have, therefore, no plans to specifically review the level of SOPO breaches or the use of SOPOs in managing risk.

I am, however, proposing, in the Criminal Justice Bill, which is currently before the Assembly, to extend the remit of a SOPO to enable the court to order the offender to undertake a specific course of action.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Death in Custody Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16744/ 11-15, in light of the Prisoner Ombudsman's recent publication of Death in Custody Reports concerning Samuel Carson and Mrs Frances McKeown at Hydebanks Wood, to detail how prison management seeks to ensure compliance with prison rules and best practice.

(AQW 17887/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) has in place a performance management system which sets key objectives for operational managers and staff and performance is managed and reported on throughout the year.

NIPS is also subject to inspections from a range of scrutiny bodies with responsibility for monitoring performance, including the Criminal Justice Inspectorate, Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons and the Prisoner Ombudsman. In addition, NIPS has an internal Performance & Standards Unit which has responsibility for auditing performance against baseline standards.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Change Team

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) how many consultants are involved with the Northern Ireland Prison Service Change Team; (ii) what type of firms are they based with; and (iii) what is the cost to date of each consultant.

(AQW 17940/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Business Consultancy Service (BCS) currently provides a consultancy service to the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) Change Team on the Review of Offender Management Administrative Functions Project. BCS is a directorate within the Department of Finance and Personnel and the central consulting group within the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Consistent with the Department of Finance and Personnel guidance on the classification of professional services, there are no other consultancy services currently being provided to the NIPS Change Team.

However, the NIPS Change Team has engaged the temporary services of a secondee from Deloitte to work on several projects in an advisory capacity, and three other Deloitte employees on a staff substitution basis, to provide specialist advice, and transfer of knowledge, to help develop and embed essential skills on a range of areas within NIPS. The costs incurred to date for the above-mentioned Deloitte staff is as follows:

Secondees	£48,310
Staff substitute (Programme and project management)	£66,800

Staff substitute (Organisational design/performance management)	£51,230
Staff substitute (Communications)	£62,620

Supporting Prisoners at Risk: Staff Examinations

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to confirm (i) how many of those, by rank, trained in Supporting Prisoner at Risk passed the related examination at the end of their training session; (ii) how many failed the examination; and (iii) of those who failed, are they now deemed unfit to provide the requirements of Supporting Prisoner at Risk, or are they to be re-trained and examined.

(AQW 17942/11-15)

Mr Ford: Prior to the review and updating of the Supporting Prisoners at Risk training materials in June 2012, there was no examination or assessment at the end of the training sessions.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Pre-release Scheme

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17146/11-15 to clarify where Kenneth Douglas spent Phase 2 of the Northern Ireland Prison Service pre-release programme.

(AQW 17943/11-15)

Mr Ford: Mr Douglas was admitted to Phase 2 of the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) pre release scheme on three occasions.

In May 2006, Mr Douglas commenced phase 2 of the pre-release scheme, whereby he resided in the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) on week days and in approved accommodation at weekends.

In September 2008, Mr Douglas commenced his second period on phase 2 of the pre-release scheme by spending week days at an approved address and weekends in the PAU.

In February 2012, Mr Douglas again commenced phase 2 of the pre-release scheme while residing at an approved address on week days and returning to Maghaberry Prison at weekends.

Prisoner Release: Supervised Residency

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17146/11-15, and prior to being placed in supervised residence in the community, (i) whether the prisoner spent time in the pre release unit or any other similar facility; and (ii) how long he spent in that facility before being deemed fit to reside in the community under supervision.

(AQW 17944/11-15)

Mr Ford: I can confirm that Mr Douglas spent two periods of time in the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) while he was on the Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) pre-release scheme, from which he progressed (on both occasions) to reside in approved accommodation.

The first period in the PAU was between May 2006 and May 2007 during which time he resided in the PAU on week days and at approved accommodation in the community on weekends.

The second period in the PAU was between September 2008 and March 2009 where he again progressed from residing there on a full time basis to weekend release in the community. On 12 March 2009 he was released on licence. In November 2010 he was returned to prison.

In January 2012 Mr Douglas was permitted short periods of unaccompanied temporary release from Maghaberry Prison (6-8 hours) on week days to an approved address, progressing to further temporary release following him satisfying further risk assessments.

In October 2012 he was recalled to prison following arrest for a number of serious criminal offences.

Legal Aid: Marian McGlinchy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) total amount of Legal Aid paid to date for Marion McGlinchy shown by legal firm and counsel costs with their relevant expenses; and (ii) expert fees including medical costs and any other associated expenditure.

(AQW 17945/11-15)

Mr Ford: The legal aid payments made to Mrs McGlinchey's legal team are detailed below, broken down by Criminal, Civil and Legal Advice and Assistance (Green Form) legal aid categories.

Criminal Legal Aid

A total of £1,124.61 (including VAT of £179.58 and disbursements of £47.13) was paid to Mrs McGlinchey's solicitor in respect of PACE advice provided at the police station.

Fees have been paid to Mrs McGlinchey's solicitor totalling £1,700.46 (including VAT of £283.41) for work done in the Magistrates' Court. The counsel who represented Mrs McGlinchey also represented one of her co-accused, so the fees paid are in respect of both defendants. It is not possible to disaggregate the payment. The total paid to counsel in respect of both defendants is £1,273.01 (including VAT of £212.17).

Civil Legal Aid

Profit Costs	£1,257.72 (including VAT of £209.62 VAT).
Counsel Fees	£360.00 (including VAT of £60 VAT).
Outlay	£18.80, solely in respect of photocopying.
Total	£1,636.52

Legal Advice and Assistance (Green Form) Scheme

Advice Type	Amount paid	VAT
PACE	£139.74	£23.83
Complaints against PSNI	£64.11	£12.82
PACE	£945.03	£179.58
Criminal Charge	£673.20	£132.14
Bail	£72.08	£14.42
Judicial Review	£88.00	£17.60
Life Sentence Review	£409.99	£75.16
Judicial Review	£184.55	£31.91
Total	£2576.70	£487.46

There were no fees paid in respect of expert witnesses or doctors.

Marian McGlinchey

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Justice to detail (i) which MLAs have made representations to his Department in the last 2 years in relation to Marian Price; and (ii) which have called for her release.

(AQW 17951/11-15)

Mr Ford: In the last two years, MLAs from Sinn Fein and SDLP have made representations to my Department in relation to Mrs Marian McGlinchey on a range of issues including consideration of her release on compassionate grounds.

In addition, MLAs from the DUP have made representation to my Department in relation to the resource implications associated with the detention of Mrs McGlinchey.

Northern Ireland Policing Board: Disablement Reviews

Mr Allister asked the Minister of Justice whether his Department's direction that Policing Division Circular 6/2007 must not be relied upon in how the Northern Ireland Policing Board initiates and conducts Percentage Disablement Reviews for retired police officers aged over 65 has resulted in any changes.

(AQW 17955/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW/17706/11-15.

HMP Maghaberry: Camera Hidden in Prisoner's Watch

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16987/11-15, (i) whether this prisoner will face criminal charges at a public court or whether it will be dealt with by Northern Ireland Prison Service internally; and (ii) whether any charges have been made to date.

(AQW 17979/11-15)

Mr Ford: The matter has been dealt with by the governor under prison rules. The prisoner was found guilty of the offence of possession of an unauthorised article.

Professional Standards Unit

Lord Morrow asked pursuant to AQW 16619/11-15, to outline the core functions of the proposed Professional Standards Unit; (ii) where the unit will be based; (iii) the date in 2013 in which it will be operational; (iv) how many staff by grade will be employed in the unit; and (v) when training will be provided to staff and by whom or what Agency.

(AQW 17980/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Professional Standards Unit will investigate the conduct of all prison service staff, including alleged or suspected misconduct or gross misconduct, and will be based at Prison Service Headquarters in Dundonald House.

With regard to when it will become operational, I refer the Member to the response I gave to AQW 17821/11-15.

The final numbers and grading of staff in the Unit will be agreed as part of the overall consultation process. When staff have been appointed, the Police Service of Northern Ireland will provide investigation training tailored to meet the specific needs of the Northern Ireland Prison Service.

Legal Aid: Republic of Ireland Residents

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice whether a person who lives in the Republic of Ireland can receive Legal Aid in Northern Ireland and to outline the circumstances where this may be possible.

(AQW 17987/11-15)

Mr Ford: Legal Aid may be granted to an individual regardless of nationality or residence. All applicants for both civil and criminal legal aid must however pass the relevant merits and means criteria and the legal proceedings for which legal aid is sought must originate within Northern Ireland.

Edward Connors: Release

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice why was convicted rapist Edward Connors permitted to be released from custody prior to completion of, and/or participation in, a sexual offender's treatment programme.

(AQW 18025/11-15)

Mr Ford: As Mr Connors received a Custody Probation Order sentence (determinate period in custody followed by a period of supervision in the community) there was no discretion to release him from custody other than on his earliest date of release.

Prisoner Assessment Unit

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17146/11-15 and AQW 16983/11-15, whether he wishes to revise his answer on whether or not this prisoner resided in the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

(AQW 18026/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Northern Ireland Prison Service (NIPS) wishes to revise its response to AQW 17146/11-15 as follows and apologises for not providing a full and accurate answer to the questions raised. Mr Douglas did reside in the Prisoner Assessment Unit (PAU) on two separate occasions while on the pre-release scheme, prior to its closure in April 2011. The timeline for his periods in the PAU and other pre-release facilities are as follows:

- 11 May 2006 – 17 May 2007: Mr Douglas resided in the PAU on weekdays and in approved accommodation at weekends.
- September 2008 – 12 March 2009: Mr Douglas resided in the PAU. He was initially spending weekdays in the PAU and weekends at an approved address. Eventually this changed to weekdays at an approved address and weekends in the PAU.
- 12 March 2009: Mr Douglas was released on licence to live in the community on a full time basis. He was subsequently returned to Maghaberry Prison in November 2010.
- 22 March 2011 to January 2012 (which includes a period of home leave): Mr Douglas was permitted a series of short (6-8 hours) unaccompanied temporary release periods (UTR) from Maghaberry. Following monitoring by Maghaberry this increased to a number of overnight periods in approved hostel accommodation.
- 13 February 2012 to 22 April 2012: Mr Douglas entered phase 2 of the pre-release scheme allowing him to spend week days in Belfast with a relative and returning to Maghaberry at weekends.
- On 23 April 2012 he entered phase 3 of the pre-release scheme to live in the community with a relative in Belfast on a full time basis. He was subsequently returned to Maghaberry Prison on 28 October 2012.

Dog Fighting

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Justice to detail the (i) number of reported cases of; and (ii) successful prosecutions for, dog fighting in each of the last five years.

(AQW 18028/11-15)

Mr Ford: There is no specific offence of 'dog fighting', however it can be prosecuted under a range of animal fighting offences. The table below gives the number of animal fighting cases reported to PSNI in 2005-2011 and the number of convictions for the calendar years 2005 to 2009 (the latest year for which conviction figures are currently available).

Animal fighting offences can be prosecuted under Sections 19(1) and 19(2) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 1972, Article 19(2) of the Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 and Sections 8(1), 8(2) and 8(3) of the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) 2011.

Number of reported cases and convictions for animal fighting offences: 2005-2011

Year	Number of cases reported to PSNI	Number of convictions
2005	0	1
2006	0	0
2007	0	1
2008	0	0
2009	0	0
2010	1	N/A
2011	3	N/A

Conviction data are collated on the principal offence rule; only the most serious offence for which an offender is convicted is included.

Conviction data for 2005-2006 should not be directly compared with data from 2007 to 2009 as the data sets are sourced from different systems.

Lead Shot: Illegal Use

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Justice to detail the number of prosecutions and convictions for illegal use of lead shot since it was banned in 2009.

(AQW 18044/11-15)

Mr Ford: The use of lead shot over wetlands by hunters was prohibited by the Department of the Environment (DOE) with effect from 1 September 2009, through the Environmental Protection (Restriction on use of Leadshot) Regulations (NI) 2009.

Responsibility of enforcing the Regulations rests with the police. The DOE is not aware of any specific prosecutions or convictions regulating from non compliance with the Regulations.

The introduction of the restrictions in 2009 was accompanied by guidance produced jointly by the Department and the main bodies representing shooting interests in Northern Ireland as a means of promoting compliance. In addition, the Department, through the auspices of the Northern Ireland Partnership Against Wildlife Crime, continually works with relevant interests to promote compliance with the law.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Prisoner Transfers

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice how many prisoners, that have been transferred from Northern Ireland Prison Service facilities to HMP Magilligan towards the end of their custodial sentences, have been returned to their original facility in each of the last five years.

(AQW 18049/11-15)

Mr Ford: Table A below sets out the number of prisoners transferred from Magilligan to Maghaberry prison in each of the last five years:

Table A

Year	No of Prisoners
2012	23 (inc 1 to Hydebank)
2011	30
2010	22
2009	19
2008	33

Decisions to transfer prisoners to and from Magilligan Prison are based on operational requirements and if the prisoner meets the criteria for that establishment. Whether, or not, a prisoner is nearing the end of their custodial sentence is not a critical factor when deciding on transfer to or from Magilligan prison.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Therapy

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16983/11-15, did the couple in question marry whilst the male was in the Pre-release Unit or similar custody and at what point after this did the therapy commence.

(AQW 18053/11-15)

Mr Ford: The marriage took place on 7 June 2006 while the male prisoner was residing in the Prisoner Assessment Unit.

A therapy programme for the male prisoner commenced prior to his marriage. Joint therapeutic sessions involving the prisoner's wife commenced in October 2007.

Sisters of Charity Facility: Accreditation

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16979/11-15, (i) whether the Sisters of Charity facility in Armagh is accredited by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and approved by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland; and (ii) whether this facility has been inspected and approved as suitable for housing persons charged with sexual offences, or those with previous convictions of a sexual nature, particularly against minors, given the close proximity to a number of schools.

(AQW 18055/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Sisters of Charity facility is not required to, and has not sought, accreditation and financial assistance from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive under its Supporting People strategy. It is also not one of the six premises required to be approved by the Probation Board and inspected in relation to the accommodation of offenders or alleged offenders requiring additional levels of supervision. The Department of Justice has no power to approve or inspect any private homes or other facilities that choose to offer accommodation to a homeless person. The decision as to whether to grant bail to an alleged offender to a specific address is a matter for the judge hearing the bail application.

Northern Ireland Prison Service: Death in Custody Reports

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 16744/11-15, to detail how management seeks to ensure compliance with prison rules and best practice especially in light of the Prisoner Ombudsman's Death in Custody Reports on Mr Samuel Carson and Mrs Frances McKeown at HMP Hydebank Wood.

(AQW 18056/11-15)

Mr Ford: I would refer the Member to the reply I gave to AQW/17887/11-15 on 31 December 2012.

Telephone Bills

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Justice to detail the cost to his Department of telephone bills in each of the last three years.

(AQW 18083/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice (DOJ) came into existence on 12th April 2010.

Expenditure on telephone (land line and mobile) calls and line rental for the DOJ, including its Agencies but not its arm's length bodies, for the financial years 2010/11 and 2011/12, and the current financial year up to the end of November 2012 are shown in the table below:

2012/13 (April to November 2012)	2011/12	2010/11
£687,196.41	£956,955.22	£971,519.59

Legal Services Commission: Funding

Lord Morrow asked the Minister of Justice (i) whether the Legal Services Commission has issued a communication to legal representatives or professional bodies indicating that legal aid funds are becoming depleted and that further funding has been sought to cover the period up to the end of the financial year; (ii) whether legal aid payments will be restricted or delayed; (iii) whether sufficient additional funding has been secured; and (iv) whether he plans to launch, and publish the outcome of, an investigation into how this situation has arisen.

(AQW 18098/11-15)

Mr Ford:

- (i) The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission wrote to the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar Council of Northern Ireland on 18 December advising them that it did not have sufficient funds to meet its projection of the sum required to pay the bills likely to fall due for payment during the current financial year and that the Commission had sought additional funding from my Department to meet the anticipated in-year pressure.

- (ii) In response to this pressure, the Commission has decided that while it will continue to assess claims in the normal way it will only issue payments up to a monthly financial ceiling. This means that payments will be delayed.
- (iii) My Department is currently considering the Commission's request for additional funding as part of the January in-year monitoring round. An additional £10m has already been committed and the scope for providing further funding is under consideration. A decision on additional funding is expected during January.
- (iv) This situation arose primarily due to an unforeseen increase in civil legal aid expenditure during the current financial year. My officials are working with the staff of the Commission to establish the reasons for this. I published my first proposals to reform civil legal aid in November 2012 and will be publishing further proposals to address the remaining problems, including those which gave rise to the current situation, later this year.

Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland: DARD Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Justice, pursuant to AQW 17638/11-15, if he would direct the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland to inspect the Central Investigation Service within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. **(AQW 18189/11-15)**

Mr Ford: The list of organisations that the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland can inspect is specified in section 46 of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. The Central Investigation Service within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is not one of those specified and as such I have no authority to require the Chief Inspector to carry out an inspection.

Department for Regional Development

Footpaths: Wellington Park, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans he his Department has to resurface the footpaths in the Wellington Park area of Bangor. **(AQW 17610/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): My Department's Roads Service has advised the footway in the Wellington Park area of Bangor is in a safe and it doesn't currently require resurfacing. Roads Service will continue to inspect this footway on a regular basis and any defects identified will be dealt with in accordance with the Roads Service Maintenance Standards.

New Developments: Road Standards

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what provision is in place to bring roads up to standard for adoption in cases of new developments, where the developer who has responsibility has gone bankrupt and who is responsible for bringing these roads up to standard. **(AQW 17895/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: I can advise that The Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980 includes provisions which enable my Department to bring roads in new developments up to adoption standards, in cases where the developer has gone bankrupt.

It is the developer's responsibility to make provision for the costs of providing new roads in housing developments. Prior to starting building works on any development where the layout of roads and footways has been determined under the Private Streets (Northern Ireland) Order 1980, a developer is required to enter into an agreement with my Department's Roads Service to provide the roads, footpaths and street lighting to the appropriate standards. This agreement is secured by a bond that allows Roads Service to complete the road works, if a developer defaults.

Where a developer has gone into administration, my Department's Roads Service will initially liaise with the administrator to seek completion of the development's roads infrastructure. If this is not possible, Roads Service will call upon the road bond and arrange for another contractor to complete the necessary works.

However, I should advise that Roads Service is not notified once a developer has gone into liquidation/administration and it may be some months before officials are aware that an individual or his company has gone into receivership.

Bangor Grammar School: Road Safety at Newbuild

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Regional Development if his Department considered the road safety of residents living in the area around the new Bangor Grammar School site. **(AQW 17898/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that during the planning process for the new 850 pupil grammar school the developer was requested to carry out a Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) to show the likely impact the development would have on the public road network and to identify those measures necessary to mitigate any adverse consequences. The TIA took into account that there had previously been a school at this location.

The following improvements to the road environment have subsequently been made as part of the scheme:

- widened footways at the site frontage along Gransha Road;
- a new Puffin enhanced road crossing;
- the relocation of two pedestrian islands on Gransha Road;
- a right turn pocket and new road markings on Gransha Road;
- 'Safe Routes to School' solar signs installed;
- the provision of a pedestrian guard rail at entrance to channel pupils and other pedestrians towards preferred crossing points;
- school bus boarding and drop off points within the school premises;
- a dedicated bus lay-by, with lowered kerbs, for easier access along Gransha Road for general public transport;
- drop-off lay-bys for parents to use on Gransha Road; and
- a new bus shelter on Gransha Road.

I am also advised that road junctions serving residential areas close to the school entrance were reviewed and were considered to have adequate sight splays and footway provision to provide safe access.

It should be noted that previously the Gransha Road in the vicinity of the school site had been provided with central hatching, right turn pockets and central pedestrian refuge islands, which channel the traffic and allow pedestrians to cross the road more safely. In addition, Roads Service has also recently widened the junction of Cranley Road to allow a left turning vehicle to safely pass a right turning vehicle.

I can assure you that Roads Service is aware of public concern relating to this issue and it intends to monitor the operation of the junctions to determine if any further measures are deemed necessary.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect his Department.

(AQW 17909/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department is committed to the prompt payment of bills for goods and services received with payment generally due within 10 working days of receipt of a valid invoice.

In addition, my Department is currently bound by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1988 as amended by the Late Payment of Commercial Debts Regulations 2002 which requires that payment should be made within agreed terms or if no terms have been agreed, 30 days after receipt of a valid invoice.

Performance against the 10 day and 30 day requirements is monitored on an ongoing basis.

In the current year, to the end of November, my Department has paid 94% of invoices within 10 days, with 98% paid within 30 days.

It is therefore anticipated that the new directive will not have a significant impact on my Department.

Payment Targets

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Regional Development how each of his Department's arm's-length bodies has performed on the 30 Day Payment Performance Targets; and whether any sector has been paid more quickly than others.

(AQW 17910/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's arms-length bodies' 30 day prompt payment performance during the financial year 2011-12 is set out below.

Arm's-Length Body	Prompt Payment %
Translink / NITHCo	97
NI Water	90

In processing payments the Department's arms length bodies make no distinction between invoices received from different sectors, as such no sector is paid more quickly than another.

Salt Bins: Removal

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development why Roads Service have removed several salt bins from rural roads following a review made at the end of last season's winter season, and instead placed grit piles at several locations, adjacent to large towns such as Bangor and Holywood.

(AQW 17915/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I should advise the Member that my Department's Roads Service has no statutory obligation to salt carriageways or footways. However, to assist the safe movement of traffic in wintry conditions, Roads Service gives consideration to placing salt bins in urban areas and grit piles in rural areas, at hills, bends or junctions on roads that are not salted. These are provided for use by the public on a self help basis.

Roads Service has advised that following a review in January 2012, it was found that salt bins were provided at the following five rural sites in North Down:

- Creighton's Green Road, Holywood (3 locations)
- Ballymoney Road, Holywood
- Ballygrainey Road, Holywood

The provision of salt bins at these locations was deemed not to be in accordance with Roads Service's policy and therefore, the salt bins were removed. However, the sites did meet the criteria for the provision of grit piles, which are now in place.

Bus Shelters: Contract

Mr Dunne asked the Minister for Regional Development what plans are in place to recommence the contract for the supply and construction of bus shelters before 2015.

(AQW 17916/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the current contract with Adshel for the provision and maintenance of bus shelters in Northern Ireland, which was approved whilst Peter Robinson was Minister, has delivered over 1,350 new bus shelters since 2001, at no cost to my Department. Whilst the contract does not expire until the end of 2015, it does not make provision for any new shelters after 2010.

To ensure the future provision of bus shelters, my Department is currently working towards establishing new contractual arrangements, to be in place for the end of 2015 when the current contract expires.

Roads Service currently has no plans to provide additional bus shelters until a new contract is awarded in 2015. In the interim, any requests for shelters will be given priority when the new contract is in place.

I should advise that local councils can also provide bus shelters, should they wish to do so.

Gritting: Largy Road, Crumlin

Mr Mitchel McLaughlin asked the Minister for Regional Development whether Largy Road, Crumlin will be included in the winter road gritting programme as many large businesses operate from this road and there is also a large residential area.

(AQW 17949/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that Largy Road has been assessed but does not meet the criteria required for inclusion on the Winter Service salting schedule. The Largy Road does not meet the criteria as it is a cul-de-sac and therefore is not a through route.

The Largy Road will be assessed for the provision of grit piles, however, it is unlikely that gradients along the road will meet the criteria of a "gradient equal to or greater than 5%".

Trains: Christmas Service

Mr Storey asked the Minister for Regional Development what steps have been taken to advertise the late Christmas shopper's special train from Belfast to Coleraine.

(AQW 17950/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Translink advise that the enhanced rail services between Coleraine and Belfast were promoted as follows:

- (i) Christmas special offers and services press release issued to press and broadcast media on 12 November 2012. This included issue to daily papers –Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, News Letter, Daily Mirror and Press Association. A press release was also tailored for regional weekly press. A press release was also sent to broadcast media and broadcast on U105 and Q Network radio.
- (ii) A safety message press release issued on 26 November 2012 to agricultural press including Farm week and Farming life and regional papers relevant to the rail network including the Belfast-Coleraine corridor publications.
- (iii) Combined press release including the enhanced services between Coleraine and Belfast, the new NI Railways Journey Check and the provision of Wi-Fi on the Enterprise, issued to press and broadcast media on 3 December 2012 including Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, News Letter, Daily Mirror, Press Association, and weekly press in areas situated along the railway network. Broadcast media included BBC, UTV, RTE, Daybreak, Radio Ulster, U105, Cool/Downtown, with interviews conducted on Citybeat and Q Network.
- (iv) Press release and picture sent to Communications manager Coleraine Borough Council on 7 December 2012.
- (v) Press release issued to all Coleraine Borough councillors and MLA's on 4 December 2012.

- (vi) A3 posters distributed to all stations on the rail network and station posters were distributed to Londonderry line stations and main Belfast stations from 27 November 2012.
- (vii) Service also publicised on Translink website and via social media Twitter and Facebook.

Gritting: Schools

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister for Regional Development in the aftermath of the recent school bus accident in County Londonderry, whether he will assure parents and children that all the roads that are used by school transport are sufficiently gritted to ensure, as far as possible, the safety of drivers, staff and pupils.

(AQW 17966/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The Member will be aware that, following the severe wintry conditions experienced at the start of December 2008, my predecessor asked my Department's Roads Service to carry out an examination of its operational response to areas around rural schools. This examination resulted in Roads Service introducing enhanced communication arrangements and priority "secondary" salting to the 46 rural schools most affected by weather conditions throughout the winter of 2008/09.

The examination also provided for change in the list of these schools as it was appreciated that the list of sites benefiting from these actions was likely to vary over time to include more schools, to take account of the extent to which adverse weather can affect different schools at different times. As a result of the impact of road conditions on other schools during 2009/10, six additional schools were added to the list in the 2010/11 season. The list now contains 50 schools.

At the same time as this review of its operational response, Roads Service amended the criteria for the provision of grit/salt piles and salt bins, so these can be provided to affected schools, if requested.

Roads Service is committed to managing the road network to promote its safe, efficient operation and to improve the network where possible within the available budget. Under this commitment, safety is always afforded the highest priority.

While I understand and appreciate the Member's concerns for those who use lightly-trafficked roads which are not on the salted network, it simply is not feasible to salt all roads. There is a fine balance to be drawn between putting even more funds into salting, or into the many other worthwhile demands on Roads Service's limited resources, many of which are also safety-related.

Roads Service: Repair Requests

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development how many requests for repair work in the North Down were received by Road Service in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 17982/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that the information requested is not held in a readily available format. However, should the Member wish to request information for specific roads within North Down, he should contact Mr George Montgomery, Section Engineer, Bangor Section Office, 72 Balloo Road, Bangor BT19 7PG (Tel: 028 9127 9805).

Roads Service: Spend

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for a breakdown of the total spend by Roads Service in the North Down area in each of the last 3 years.

(AQW 17984/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: Details of expenditure by my Department's Roads Service in the North Down Borough Council area in the financial years 2009/10 to 2011/12 are provided in the table below:

North Down Spend	2009/10 £k	2010/11 £k	2011/12 £k
Operations & Maintenance	£1,735	£2,190	£1,749
Capital	£2,569	£2,062	£3,145
Total	£4,304	£4,252	£4,894

I should advise that Roads Service does not simply split its total budget for capital expenditure on roads across all the district council areas. Major road improvements are prioritised on a countrywide basis taking account of a broad range of criteria such as strategic planning policy, traffic flow, number of accidents, potential travel save times, environmental impact, accessibility and value for money. While the actual spend on a major works scheme may be within one district council area, the benefits of such schemes are not confined to the district council, constituency or county in which they are located.

Gritting: Vehicles

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development what is the projected capital spend for replacing gritting vehicles in each of the next 3 years.

(AQW 17985/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department's Roads Service has advised that an estimate of the capital allocation for plant and fleet procurement is £1.5 million in 2013/14 and £2 million in 2014/15. The availability of capital funding in 2015/16, which is not yet known, will be dependent on the next budget outcome.

The confirmed funding covers all fleet procurement, including gritting vehicles. The amount to be invested in new gritting vehicles, which has still to be determined, will be dependent upon strategic requirement and age and condition.

Given the levels of funding, it is estimated that 8 - 10 gritting vehicles will be replaced during 2013/14 and 10 -12 during 2014/15.

George Best Belfast City Airport: Rail Access

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister for Regional Development (i) for his assessment of the convenience of the rail system for users of George Best Belfast City Airport; and (ii) whether he has any plans to put in place an additional rail halt to serve the airport and improve pedestrian access.

(AQW 18017/11-15)

Mr Kennedy:

- (i) Translink advise that the current access for rail users wishing to avail of travel from Belfast George Best Belfast City Airport is via Sydenham rail halt, and then the pedestrian Roads Service footbridge. Whilst not as convenient for intending airport passengers as Translink would like, alternative access arrangements have been considered on a number of occasions in the past but there have been constraints given the infrastructure of the surrounding area and difficulties involved in acquiring adjacent land to facilitate any such development. Finally, it should also be noted that Translink provide a frequent bus service from Great Victoria Street Station to George Best Belfast City Airport (20 minute service at peak times). Details relating to fares and timetable information can be found on Translink's website.
- (ii) There are no plans at present to provide an alternative rail halt to serve George Best Belfast City Airport. However, I plan to carry out a general public consultation in the coming months on what should be our priorities for future railways investment. The responses to this consultation will be used to inform future budget decisions within the policy prioritisation framework to be developed under the new approach to Regional Transportation Strategy.

Department for Social Development

Biomass Heating

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether feasibility studies have been conducted to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching his Department's buildings to biomass heating.

(AQW 16021/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): The Department for Social Development has not conducted feasibility studies to assess the potential savings that could be achieved by switching departmental buildings to biomass heating.

Housing: Discretionary Payments

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how long the discretionary housing payment system will last from time of initial application; and whether every application for the discretionary housing payment is paid to assist with housing costs.

(AQW 17618/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An award of a Discretionary Housing payment will normally run for six months from the date of application, although all awards must end on 31 March each year. At the end of this period the claimant may make another application for a further period and this will be considered although there is no guarantee that another award will be made, and if it is, that it would be for the same amount as the original award. Each claim is considered individually on its own circumstances.

Not every application for Discretionary Housing payment results in an award. During the period from April to October 2012, the Housing Executive received 11,105 applications for Discretionary Housing payment; of these 1,316 were refused.

Housing: Regional Development Strategy

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development how the figures set out in the Housing Strategy area plans relate to those in the Regional Development Strategy; and how the housing content of the area plans in the Housing Strategy compares with the housing targets set out in the Regional Development Strategy.

(AQW 17743/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are no area specific plans contained within the draft Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland.

The Regional Development Strategy which is published by the Department for Regional Development outlines the number of homes of all tenures that are required in Northern Ireland to meet demand up to 2035. The figures within the Regional Development Strategy are based on Housing Growth Indicators and are a guide for those preparing Area Development Plans, namely the Department of the Environment.

Housing need is addressed by the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) and is assessed by the Housing Executive (NIHE). Details can be found on the Housing Executive website at: http://www.nihe.gov.uk/shdp_amendments_28th_december_2012.pdf.

Home Insulation

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what more his Department can do to help people insulate their homes. (AQW 17782/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department, through the Warm Homes Scheme, offers cavity wall and loft insulation to privately owned and privately rented households receiving a qualifying benefit. The Housing Executive checks insulation in their properties when they are carrying out other planned maintenance work and where necessary this is replaced or topped up. This represents a significant investment in insulating homes.

Carbon Monoxide Detectors: Housing Executive Homes

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many Housing Executive homes in North Down have not yet had Carbon Monoxide Detectors fitted. (AQW 17829/11-15)

Mr McCausland: There are 340 Housing Executive homes in North Down that have not yet had a Carbon Monoxide detector installed. This is the number of homes that are still outstanding in a scheme for 1,709 homes that started in early 2012 and they are included in a mop up scheme which is due to commence in early January 2013.

Ministerial Private Office: Running Costs

Mr Campbell asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost of running his Ministerial Private Office in the last financial year. (AQW 17866/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Private Office is subsumed under the Corporate Services Unit of the Department. The cost of running this unit for the financial year 2011/12 was £966, 651.

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister for Social Development how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect his Department. (AQW 17912/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The EU Late Payment Directive was originally brought into UK law in 1998 by way of the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act. The scope of the Directive is now being extended (2011/7/EU) and must be implemented by each member state by 16 March 2013. The UK government issued a consultation paper in preparation for the change in law and is due to publish its response next month. My Department will aim to comply with the new Directive.

For the Member's further information, this Department has not made any payments under the 1998 Act in the last 3 financial years, 2009-10 to 2011-12.

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Commencement Orders

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development when the relevant Commencement Orders in relation to the Charities Act NI (2008) have been, or will be, presented to the Assembly; and what functions they have been carrying out in the interim. (AQW 17913/11-15)

Mr McCausland: A total of three Commencement Orders have been made to date to implement the provisions of the Charities Act (NI) 2008. These were made on 26 March 2009 (No.1), 22 September 2009 (No.2) and 21 January 2011 (No.3). The relevant provisions commenced include establishment of the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI), powers for disclosure of information by and to the Commission, establishment of the Charity Tribunal for Northern Ireland and a range of regulatory, investigatory and enforcement powers. A further Commencement Order (No.4) is planned for early 2013 to enable CCNI to assume responsibility for Cy-pres provisions.

CCNI has engaged extensively with local charities to prepare them for future regulation. It has produced and distributed a range of advice and guidance helping charity trustees and members of the public comply with and understand charity law and other relevant legislation. It has completed over 100 investigations to address matters of concern in local charities. A report has been produced to highlight common concerns identified including poor governance in charities, poor financial control, lack of transparency and the damage of internal disputes.

The Commission has also established system to allow for the registration of local charities, due to commence in Autumn 2013, and made preparations for public consultation on the registration process and public benefit guidance.

Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008: Charity Commission

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister for Social Development what extra functions the Charity Commission will have when the entire Charities Act NI (2008) is operational.

(AQW 17914/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The provisions within the Charities Act (NI) 2008 are being implemented on a phased basis to enable the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI) and local charities to prepare for full regulation.

Further Commencement Orders are planned which will enable CCNI to assume responsibility for a range of functions including application of cy-pres, charity land, the register of charities, accounting and reporting and charitable incorporated organisations.

Social Housing: Newbuild Programme

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how he will address objective need within the present social housing new build programme.

(AQW 17918/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I would refer the member to my previous answer in relation to AQW 17621/11-15 which dealt with your similar question in some detail.

All social housing programmes are constructed having regard to the annual assessment of housing need carried out by the Housing Executive, coupled with Strategic Guidelines that direct resources to specified need groups across dedicated geographical areas of need.

My priority is to ensure that resources are directed on an equitable basis to our most vulnerable individuals, families and communities.

Housing: Regeneration Tool

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how he intends to use housing as a regeneration tool.

(AQW 17919/11-15)

Mr McCausland: As I have outlined in the draft Housing Strategy, my Department, in conjunction with the Housing Executive and others intends to pilot housing-led regeneration in four areas to improve current poor housing stock and deliver new social and affordable homes.

Through this programme, the aim is to unlock wider physical and social regeneration by providing a focus for environmental upgrading, improved access to amenities and access to economic activity; with the housing interventions acting as the initial driver.

Social Housing: Newbuilds, North Belfast

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development to detail (i) the social housing new builds in North Belfast in each of the last two years, broken down by (a) location and; (b) the amount spent on each development; (ii) the proposed housing developments in North Belfast in each of the next 2 years, broken down by (a) location; and (b) proposed spend on each development; and (iii) how much has been spent on refurbishing social housing in North Belfast in each of the last two years.

(AQW 17920/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Please find detailed in Tables 1 and 2 below the social housing new builds in North Belfast in each of the last two years, 2010/11 and 2011/12, broken down by a) location and b) the amount of spend on each development.

Table 1 - North Belfast New Build 2010/11

a) Scheme / Location	Units	Total Scheme Costs	b) Housing Association Grant
Rathcoole Gardens, Newtownabbey (T)	28	2,594,785	2,111,899
Rosapenna Parade, Belfast	2	301,908	165,298
Sunningdale Gardens, Belfast (T)	46	7,378,798	4,692,178
Gainsborough Infill, Belfast (T)	17	2,036,147	1,604,410
6-12 Whitewell Road, Belfast	15	1,554,800	947,253
Brookfield Mill, Belfast	40	5,320,000	3,787,840

a) Scheme / Location	Units	Total Scheme Costs	b) Housing Association Grant
Ladbrook Drive, Belfast	1	117,111	76,478
Prospect Park, Belfast	2	208,800	116,303
Alliance Avenue, Belfast (T)	4	521,869	305,910
Lands at Oldpark Avenue (T)	4	507,317	323,797
Loughview Terrace, Belfast (T)	9	1,250,910	846,282
Shore Road Regeneration	3	326,614	224,937
Mount Street/High Street, Bawnmore (T)	4	383,148	273,758
1 Doagh Road, Newtownabbey	13	1,639,931	1,265,315
75-77 Cliftonville Road	6	512,096	324,018
Delaware Building 119 Limestone Road, Belfast	22	1,352,000	889,616
The Glen, Limestone Road, Belfast (T)	32	4,512,492	3,046,641
Atlantic House, Atlantic Avenue, Belfast	3	330,494	201,681
Factory Site, Alliance Avenue, Belfast	29	3,487,487	2,615,664
Stanhope Ste Phase 2	11	1,454,998	1,067,173
466 Shore Road, Rathcoole	10	1,174,725	697,640
186 Cliftonpark, Avenue, Belfast	8	727,610	444,877
Tudor Phase 4, Belfast (Transfer)	11	1,582,078	991,805
Tudor/Shankill OTS	2	158,585	134,124
Total	322	39,434,703	27,154,897

Table 2 - North Belfast New Build 2011/12

a) Scheme / Location	Units	Total Scheme Costs	b) Housing Association Grant
212 Cliftonville Road, Belfast	10	1,396,075	693,394
Tigers Bay Rehabs, Belfast (T)	10	1,059,060	654,192
Rush Park, Newtownabbey (T)	17	1,798,738	944,649
2 Allworthy Avenue, Belfast	3	364,116	158,306
Mountcollyer Rehabs, Belfast (T)	5	578,939	340,571
Ardoyne Acquisitions Phase 9B (26 Brookfield Place)	1	85,261	84,605
Ardoyne Acquisitions Phase 9A (1c Flax Street, Belfast)	1	118,354	78,957
3 Estoril Court, Belfast	1	69,957	58,162
1-39 Leopold Street, Belfast	10	1,070,680	459,877
Thompson House, Belfast	21	2,110,622	2,113,376
Coulters Site, Antrim Road, Belfast	10	1,137,566	736,708
142-144 Clifton Park Avenue, Belfast (T)	6	813,960	374,060
North Belfast ESPs	6	407,114	255,260
Total	101	11,010,442	6,952,117

- (ii) I am currently considering the draft Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) which will operate across the three year timeframe 2013/14 to 2015/16. As the current Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) period ends in 2014/15, only the first two years of this new programme are firm, with plans for the third year determined by the outcome of the next CSR.

I will be happy to provide an update when I have fully considered and approved the programme.

- (iii) With regard to how much has been spent on refurbishment of Housing Executive stock (planned maintenance schemes) in North Belfast, in each of the last two years, I can advise that £4.7m and £3.6m was spent in 2010/11 and 2011/12 respectively.

Social Housing: Unoccupied Properties

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development why houses, which are owned by social housing providers, in the (i) Lower Old Park; (ii) Greater Shankill; and (iii) Westland areas of Belfast are currently unoccupied.

(AQW 17921/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that it currently has 37 vacant properties in the Lower Oldpark area, which comprise of 26 properties due to be transferred to Clanmil Housing Association as part of the Lower Oldpark strategy and the remaining 11 properties are waiting relet.

Within the Housing Executive's Shankill District Office area there are 236 vacant properties, 170 of which are awaiting demolition, 2 are pending sale and the remaining 64 are due to be relet.

The Housing Executive currently has five vacant properties in the Westland area which are due to be relet.

In the Housing Association sector, only six Housing Associations own stock in either the Lower Oldpark, the Greater Shankill or the Westland areas of Belfast. In the Lower Oldpark area, one Housing Association reported a vacant property citing low demand for the area as the reason for the vacancy. A number of Housing Associations confirmed that they held 115 vacant properties in the Greater Shankill area. The reasons for the vacancies varied between change of tenancy, low demand to a major refurbishment scheme accounting for 47 of the 115 vacant properties. None of the Housing Associations reported any vacancies in the Westland area.

I hope that by the end of the financial year the finalised Empty Homes Strategy document will be released and as a result measures will be put in place to ensure that empty homes throughout Northern Ireland are properly targeted and over time brought back into use.

Freedom of Information Requests

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development, pursuant to AQW 16782/11-15, for an explanation of the tenfold increase in the proportion of Freedom of Information requests not answered within the statutory time limit between 2010 and 2011; and what actions he will take to rectify this ongoing problem.

(AQW 17936/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of Freedom of Information requests received in my department during 2010 was 183. This figure increased to 224 in 2011, which represents a significant increase of 22% in the number of requests received.

Although 22.3% of the requests received in 2011 were answered outside the permitted clearance time of 20 working days, the Department responded to 28% of this figure within 21-23 days of date of receipt.

The Department strives to meet its statutory obligation of answering requests within 20 working days of receiving a request for information.

DSD will continue to review its processes to improve its response rate to FOI requests.

Areas at Risk Programme: Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the Areas at Risk programme for Beechfield Estate, Donaghadee; and what proposals are in place.

(AQW 17960/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Areas at Risk programme in the Beechfield area of Donaghadee comprises a range of community activities drawn up by the Beechfield Residents' Association Planning Team. The team has worked in conjunction with the Ards Development Bureau & Community Network. The programme includes:

- support for local community infrastructure;
- community events;
- provision of equipment for boxing club and community house;
- training and adult education; and
- healthcare.

The Department is also working with the Ards Development Bureau & Community Network Partnership on a new project to provide computers in the community house, and with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on an additional project to carry out minor environmental improvements within the Estate.

Social Housing: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Social Development (i) to detail the social housing stock levels in North Down, broken down by bedroom numbers; (ii) to detail the current levels of vacancy and demand for each property type; and (iii) whether his Department holds the same information for the private rental sector.

(AQW 18060/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested for Housing Executive stock as the Housing Executive does not routinely collate information by Parliamentary constituency. However, in relation to (i) and (ii) the table below provides the relevant information for the Housing Executive's Bangor District Office area which covers North Down and also for Housing Association stock in the North Down constituency.

Number of Bedrooms	Housing Executive Stock (Bangor District Office area at 30 November 2012)		Housing Association Stock (North Down Constituency)		Waiting List (1 Dec 2012)
	Total	Vacant	Total	Vacant	
1 bed	504	34	481	3	1,419
2 bed	1,045	15	483	12	632
3 bed	1,062	19	86	3	227
4 + bed	61	0	14	2	97
Total	2,672	68 *	1064**	20*	2,375

* Note: only 24 vacant NIHE properties were lettable; remaining properties were vacant for various reasons such as undergoing repairs, decanting, pending demolition or pending sale.

Note: the majority of vacant Housing Association stock is awaiting allocation, 1 is awaiting demolition.

** Housing Association figures include units of sheltered and supported living accommodation.

My Department does not hold the information requested at (iii).

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Welfare Reform Bill: Work Capability Assessments

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development in relation to work capability assessments, (i) whether his Department has entered into a contract with any healthcare company to carry out assessments following the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill and, if so, to outline how his Department could enter into such a contract before the relevant legislation passes through the Assembly; (ii) how much his Department pays any company to provide assessments per person; (iii) when his Department's contract with any company that provides assessments expires; and (iv) to outline the terms and conditions of any contract his Department has with any company that provides work capability assessments.

(AQW 18090/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In relation to the Work Capability Assessment.

- (i) The Department has not entered into any contract with any healthcare company to carry out work capability assessments following the introduction of the Welfare Reform Bill (NI) 2012. Atos Healthcare have been providing medical advice, including face-to-face assessments for the Work Capability Assessment, on behalf of the Social Security Agency since 20 June 2011.
- (ii) The charging regime within the supplier agreement is deemed commercially sensitive and therefore individual charging information cannot be disclosed.
- (iii) The contract was awarded for seven years, with an option to extend for a further 3 years.
- (iv) The Medical Support Services Agreement with Atos Healthcare specifies the service requirements, and prescribes the quality of service and performance levels that must be achieved.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Friday 18 January 2013

Written Answers to Questions

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Commissioner for Older People: Annual Budget

Mr Weir asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister what is the annual budget of the Older People's Commissioner. (AQW 17735/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness (The First Minister and deputy First Minister): Within the terms of the current Comprehensive Spending Review settlement, for 2012/13, the budget is £988k, for 2013/14 it is £959k and for 2014/15 it is £930k.

Should the Commissioner require additional resources, she does have the option of submitting bids for them to OFMDFM.

One Plan: Job Creation

Mr Eastwood asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister, pursuant to AQW 14294/11-15, in relation to the job creation targets contained in One Plan, why 1175 jobs promoted through the public, community and private sectors is the only milestone contained within their Department's Programme for Government key commitments that is not included as a target or action in their 2012/13 business plan.

(AQW 18050/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: The Programme for Government commitment to develop the One Plan is reflected in the OFMDFM Business Plan. The One Plan is a comprehensive document addressing the full range of regeneration issues. The key targets associated with the One Plan, including employment, are reported on through the usual Programme for Government delivery plans.

Asset Management Unit

Mr D Bradley asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for a breakdown of the £87.7 million of receipts that have been identified by the Assets Management Unit.

(AQW 18136/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: We would refer the member to AQW 17631/11-15 which was answered on 19 December 2012.

Delivering Social Change: Signature Projects

Mr Humphrey asked the First Minister and deputy First Minister for an update on the six Signature Projects announced in October 2012 under Delivering Social Change.

(AQO 3117/11-15)

Mr P Robinson and Mr M McGuinness: Since our announcement on 10 October 2012, the lead departments responsible for each of the Signature Programmes have appointed Senior Responsible Owners and developed initial Programme Delivery Plans.

Work on the implementation of these plans is ongoing and officials from OFMDFM are in the process of meeting Senior Responsible Officers from other departments to review progress and expedite delivery.

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Late Payment Directive

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development how the late payment directive currently going through Westminster will affect her Department.

(AQW 17908/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill (The Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development): Following consultation, the Late Payment Directive 2011/7/EU is due to be adopted in March 2013. The Directive highlights that public authorities are required to pay suppliers within 30 calendar days of receipt of an undisputed invoice.

For those payments made directly by my Department, the current terms are within 30 calendar days of receipt of an undisputed invoice.

For this current financial year to October 2012, 30 day prompt payment performance for all non-disputed invoices is 98%. Therefore it is expected that the late payment directive will have a minimal affect on my Department.

Cheese: Production and Export

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail, for each of the last three years, the quantity of Northern Irish cheese (i) produced; (ii) exported to (a) England; (b) Scotland; (c) Wales; and (d) the Republic of Ireland; and (iii) exported to other countries, listed by country.

(AQW 18110/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development does not collect data on the quantity of cheese produced and sold either domestically or elsewhere. Data collected on the utilisation of raw milk in the north of Ireland indicates that in 2012, 570 million litres was used in cheese production.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to detail the number of fraud cases the Central Investigation Service has taken to prosecution stage in each of the last 5 years.

(AQW 18249/11-15)

Mrs O'Neill: In the current financial year to date two of the Central Investigation Service fraud investigations have resulted in prosecution.

During the previous 5 years the following number of cases has resulted in prosecutions.

Year	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Total
Number of Fraud Cases Prosecuted	0	0	1	0	1	2

Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure

Fishing: Lakes in County Fermanagh

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure whether there are any plans to increase the number of fishing stands in lakes in County Fermanagh.

(AQW 18125/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín (The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure): The Department has provisional plans to increase the number of angling stands on the following Public Angling Estate waters in County Fermanagh over the next two financial years:

- Killyfole (Mill Lough) - three angling stands;
- Mill Lough (Bellanaleck) - two angling stands and one disabled access stand;
- Meenameen Lough - eleven angling stands and one disabled access stand.

The Department also commits resources to the maintenance and replacement of existing stands.

Olympic and Paralympic Games: Legacy

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure to outline her legacy strategy for the Olympic and Paralympic games.

(AQW 18139/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The strategic legacy benefits of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games have been identified as sport, community engagement and the economy. In relation to sport, the legacy strategy will centre primarily on the delivery of my

strategy for sport, Sport Matters. The success of the 2012 Games generally, the achievements of north of Ireland athletes and the inspiration of international competitors who trained here will all be used as a catalyst for driving forward Sport Matters' 3 key pillars of sporting legacy, namely improved Participation, Performance and Places for sport.

In relation to community engagement, the legacy strategy will focus on further enhancing the social cohesion and breaking down of barriers around disability that local 2012 related events helped to generate, and on ensuring that inclusivity remains at the heart of the planning and delivery of future local events.

In relation to the economic strategy all of our successful 'Games' contractors have boosted confidence in local business. DCAL will continue to work closely with partners to further enhance and develop the confidence, capacity and capability of our local businesses to compete on the world stage and in bidding for future global projects.

Fishing: Illegal Netting

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure pursuant to AQW 17137/11-15, to detail the penalty imposed following each conviction.

(AQW 18199/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Pursuant to AQW 17137/11-15 the table below detail the penalties imposed following each conviction:

2007	Fines imposed	Court costs	Total
Case 1	£400	£160	£560.00
Case 2	£400	£160	£560.00
Total	£800	£320	£1120

2008	Fines imposed	Court costs	Total
Case 1	£80	£85	£165.00
Case 2	£240.00	£85.00	£325.00
Total	£320.00	£170.00	£490.00

2009	Fine imposed	Court costs	Total
Case 1	0	£16.00	£16.00
Case 2	0	£16.00	£16.00
Case 3	£100	£85.00	£185.00
Case 4	£100	£85.00	£185.00
Case 5	£100	£85.00	£185.00
Case 6	£5.00	£91.00	£96.00
Total	£305	£378	£683

2010	Fine imposed	Court costs	Total
Case 1	£250	£145	£395
Case 2	£150	£109	£259
Case 3	£225	£109	£334
Case 4	£150	£94	£244
Case 5	£500	£109	£609
Case 6	£400	£85	£485
Case 7	£1200	£85	£1285
Case 8	£300	£91	£391
Case 9	£100	£91	£191
Total	£3275	£918	£4193

2011	Fine imposed	Court costs	Total
Case 1	£300	£85	£385
Case 2	£400	£85	£485
Case 3	£400	£85	£485
Case 4	£250	£85	£335
Total	£1350	£340	£1690

Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what support her Department has provided to the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association, in each of the last ten years,
(AQW 18205/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Sport NI, which is an arm's-length body of DCAL, has provided the Northern Ireland Civil Service Sports Association (NICSSA) with a range of support services on an ongoing basis over the past 10 years. This includes guidance for business planning and support with recruitment and selection procedures for sports development staff.

Furthermore, within the last 3 financial years, Sport NI has provided a total of £1,213,551 exchequer funding to NICSSA. This is broken down as follows: -

- 2009/10 - £1,209,391 capital funding for the construction of sports pitches, floodlighting, fencing and enabling works through the Building Sport programme.
- 2009/10 - £2,470 revenue funding for the Civil Service Cheetahs through the Awards for Sport programme.
- 2010/11 - £1,690, revenue funding for PlayBall Street Striker through the Awards for Sport programme.

Central Investigation Service

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, pursuant to AQW 17332/11-15, to detail the number of cases the Central Investigation Service of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development have investigated at the request of her Department, in each of the last five years.
(AQW 18250/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: The table at Annex A details the number of cases the DARD Central Investigation Service have investigated at the request of DCAL, in each of the past five years.

Annex A

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
DCAL cases investigated by DARD CIS	0	1	4	3	0

World Police and Fire Games: North Down

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure what sporting facilities in North Down will be used during the World Police and Fire Games.
(AQW 18262/11-15)

Ms Ní Chuilín: Bangor Aurora Aquatics and Leisure Complex, Bangor Sportsplex and Ballyholme Yacht Club are the sports facilities in North Down planned for use in the 2013 World Police and Fire Games.

There are a number of sports events currently planned for these venues.

Confirmation that these events will take place will depend on the number of competitors that register for each sport.

Department of Education

Education Bill: Savings

Mr Kinahan asked the Minister of Education to detail each area of saving within the Education Bill.
(AQW 18158/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd (The Minister of Education): The Education Bill will lead to savings through the dissolution of 8 existing bodies and their replacement by the Education and Skills Authority. Beyond that, the regionalisation of services, and more efficient delivery of the education estate through area planning will lead to further savings over the longer term. More detailed

information will be provided in the Full Business Case which will be submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel in the near future.

Cambridge House Grammar School: Board of Governors

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education to outline the timescale for the appointment of departmental representatives to schools' Boards of Governors; and when these representatives will be appointed to the Board of Cambridge House Grammar School, Ballymena. [R]

(AQW 18191/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: DE governor appointments to voluntary grammar and grant maintained integrated schools are classified as public appointments and are made by me as Minister for Education.

DE also 'nominates' governors to a number of controlled and maintained schools, including Cambridge House Grammar School. These governors are appointed by the relevant Education and Library Board or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

I am committed to making DE governor appointments in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Commissioner of Public Appointments. It is my preference to have a choice of candidates for each DE governor post. In some cases, despite several promotional campaigns and recruitment efforts the department does not yet have enough prospective candidates to allow for the appointments to be processed. The department is continuing to make efforts to expand the pool of applicants so that the remaining vacancies can be filled as soon as possible.

Cambridge House Grammar school's has 4 DE nominated governors. The Department is continuing to seek new nominees to provide to the NEELB to fill the 2 vacancies that have arisen due to resignations.

Education and Library Boards: Industrial Disputes

Mr Frew asked the Minister of Education, in each of the last five years, (i) how many disputes in each Education and Library Board have been settled through the Labour Relations Agency; (ii) how many staff have taken each Education and Library Board to court; and (iii) on how many occasions has each Education and Library Board settled out of court. [R]

(AQW 18192/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: It is not possible to provide the information requested broken down by both year and by Education and Library Board (ELB) area as the small numbers involved would require a high level of suppression to prevent identification of an individual, in line with the confidentiality principle of the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice on Official Statistics.

The information set out in the tables below provides a breakdown in each of the last five years (Table A) and a breakdown by ELB area (Table B).

Table A: Number of Cases in all ELBs in each of the last five years

	(i) Cases settled through Labour Relations Agency	(ii) Tribunal & Court Employment Cases	(iii) Tribunal & Court Employment Cases Settled
2008	6	19	8
2009	9	34	19
2010	7	39	16
2011	6	23	8
2012	7	18	28
Total	35	133	79

Table B: Number of Cases in last five years by ELB Area

	(i) Cases settled through Labour Relations Agency	(ii) Tribunal & Court Employment Cases	(iii) Tribunal & Court Employment Cases Settled
BELB	4	18	9
NEELB	6	27	11
SEELB	8	41	24
SELB	10	11	8
WELB	7	36	27
Total	35	133	79

Schoolchildren: Healthy Eating

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Education what are his Department's initiatives to encourage healthy eating amongst pupils. (AQW 18197/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department of Education (DE) recognises that a healthy, balanced diet is vital for children's growth and development, and for their long term health and well being and has proactively worked to improve the quality of food in schools here.

A comprehensive range of initiatives are in place to encourage healthy eating amongst pupils. This includes compulsory nutritional standards for school lunches which are now in place in all our schools. Standards for other food and drinks provided in schools (breakfast clubs, tuck shops, vending machines) have also been drawn up to which schools are expected to adhere. I have allocated funding of over £3 million in 2012/13 to support the implementation of the standards to ensure that pupils are presented with healthy options and encouraged to eat healthily. DE also provides joint funding for a regional Food in Schools Coordinator to provide specialist support in all aspects of healthy eating.

The "Personal Development and Mutual Understanding" (primary) and "Learning for Life and Work" (post-primary) strands of the curriculum allow pupils to explore the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity, the consequences of poor dietary choices on their physical and emotional health, ways of achieving a healthy diet and ways of developing their self-esteem. In addition, the curriculum requires all children to undertake Home Economics at Key Stage 3 which provides opportunities for young people to develop their understanding of a healthy diet and the hygienic and healthy use of foods in the preparation of meals.

DE is currently working with the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to finalise a joint Food in Schools policy which advocates a whole school approach to all food and drinks provided in schools to ensure that all children should develop the knowledge and skills necessary to make healthy food choices now and in later life. I intend, along with the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety, to seek Executive agreement on the policy as soon as possible. Subject to that agreement, it is intended to publish the policy later in this school year.

Schoolchildren: Language other than English

Mr McGimpsey asked the Minister of Education (i) how many; and (ii) what percentage of (a) primary; and (b) post-primary pupils in South Belfast have a first language other than English; and whether the continuing growth in the numbers of such pupils is taken into account by his Department when assessing the capacity of schools in South Belfast. (AQW 18198/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The enrolment capacity of a school is determined by the Department having regard to the actual teaching accommodation which is available. The number of pupils within an area whose first language is other than English is not a factor in this calculation.

The most recent data available is from the 2011/12 annual school census; data from the 2012/13 census will be available at the end of February. The information requested is contained in the table below.

Primary and post primary pupils who have a first language other than English and who attend a school located in the South Belfast constituency – 2011/12

School type	Pupils with a first language other than English	Total enrolment	%
Primary	1,029	9,219	11.2
Post primary	552	9,673	5.7
Total	1,581	18,892	8.4

Source: school census

Note:

1 Figures for primary include nursery, reception and year 1 – 7 classes.

Belfast Royal Academy: Capital Works

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Education what funding has been allocated for the refurbishment and development of Belfast Royal Academy. (AQW 18291/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: A total of £405,000.00 has been approved in the 2012-13 financial year for minor capital works for refurbishment and development at Belfast Royal Academy.

Romanian Language: GCSE or A Level

Mr Campbell asked the Minister of Education whether his Department has considered any requests by parents for their children to study the Romanian language to a GCSE or A-Level standard.

(AQW 18327/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not received any requests, from any source, regarding study of the Romanian language, at any level.

The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) has also confirmed that it has received no requests. Therefore no qualification has been developed by any Awarding Organisation.

Where there is evidence of sufficient demand for a GCSE or GCE language qualification that is likely to have a relatively small candidature, it will be developed and awarded by one of the five GCSE/GCE Awarding Organisations. This process has been agreed with the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ).

Sixth-form Students: Travel Expenses

Mr Agnew asked the Minister of Education whether he will consider changing the rules relating to the payment of travel expenses to sixth form students when they transfer to a school that is not their nearest school but because it is offering their preferred subjects.

(AQW 18338/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The existing Home to School Transport policy is set out in DE Circular 1996/41, which can be found on the Department's website. Within that policy, assistance with school transport is based on only two criteria, that is, (i) distance, and (ii) suitable school, and not subject choice.

I have no plans at present to change this policy. However, following the outcome of the current area-based planning proposals, it would be my intention to conduct a review of school transport in which the issue you have raised will be examined.

Class Sizes: Research

Ms Lo asked the Minister of Education for his assessment of the research carried out by the Institute of Education, University of London on the effect of class size when teaching children age 7-11 years; and whether his Department will take cognisance of the findings.

(AQW 18341/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Department is aware of this research, which concentrates on the results of class size on teaching, especially the interactive aspects. What the study does not cover is the educational outcomes of teaching different sizes of classes.

It concludes teachers should think about the best ways of teaching different sizes of class. The researchers found that individualisation of teaching still constituted a small part of each pupil's experience and for the most part teaching took place on a whole class basis, whether in a small or large class.

There has been considerable research carried out on the effect of class sizes on the teaching and learning of pupils. While evidence suggests that smaller class sizes in early years can have a positive impact on outcomes, it has also consistently highlighted that the quality of teaching is the most important factor in determining educational outcomes, a key factor which is reflected in core Departmental policies. In view of the evidence surrounding the early years, it is the Department's policy to keep classes for our youngest pupils, (Years 1-4), to a maximum of 30 pupils.

There is no evidence to demonstrate that smaller class sizes positively affect outcomes for pupils in Years 5-7. Indeed the report concludes that it is the flexibility to teach in different ways that seems important. Furthermore, it states that this might account for why the effects of class size on teaching are not obviously affecting pupil attainment (Blatchford et al, 2004).

Ultimately, what is essential for good quality provision is high quality teaching, a curriculum that is matched to the needs, interests and abilities of the pupils and a relentless focus on improvement and raising standards.

I note the research was conducted in England and you will know that in the north of Ireland the Revised Curriculum has been in place since 2009/10. This allows our teachers to tailor the curriculum to suit the needs of their pupils and to adapt their teaching. Furthermore, the effective use of data to track pupil progress allows teachers to identify those pupils at risk of not achieving their full potential and enabling them to adapt the strategies they use in their delivery of the curriculum, customising it to best effect. The recent findings of the Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) and Trends in Mathematics and Science (TIMMS) studies of Year 6 pupils shows that our Key Stage 2 outcomes show high attainment at primary level education.

Rural Schools: Bus Services

Mrs D Kelly asked the Minister of Education what are the criteria for the provision of school buses for rural schools.

(AQW 18344/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The existing Home to School Transport policy is set out in DE Circular 1996/41, which can be found on the Department's website. Within that policy, assistance with school transport is based on only two criteria, that is, (i) distance, and (ii) suitable school, and does not include criteria specific to either rural or urban settings.

However, given the dispersed nature of the school population in rural areas, it is more likely that pupils in such areas will be eligible for assistance with transport, unlike in urban areas. Boards will decide, based on an analysis of the number and distribution of eligible pupils and the journey time of routes, whether a bus is the appropriate, and cost effective, means of meeting their legal obligation to provide eligible pupils with transport assistance.

Sure Start: Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how much will be spent on the Sure Start programme in Bangor over the next three financial years.

(AQW 18363/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The business plan for the Bangor Sure Start project is currently being prepared. Following assessment by the Eastern Childcare Partnership it will be submitted to DE for consideration. Funding decisions will be made on the basis of the business plan and taking account of the budget available.

Collegiate System: Historical Investigations

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail any historical investigations which his Department has carried out on the Collegiate system.

(AQW 18374/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: My Department has not carried out any historical investigations of the "Collegiate system", but two independent working groups established by but working independently of my Department did consider this issue some years ago.

In 2000 the then Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, established an independent working group, chaired by Gerry Burns, to examine the selective system of education here. This group's report, known as the Burns report, recommended the establishment of Collegiates – a formal structure of groups of schools that would co-operate on matters of common interest.

Following the publication of the Burns Report there was extensive consultation, including a household survey conducted in April 2002. The proposal on Collegiates was rejected by the majority of respondents, including the majority of schools consulted.

In 2003 the then direct rule Minister with responsibility for Education, Jane Kennedy, established another independent working group, chaired by Steve Costello. The remit of that group was "to take account of the responses to the consultation on the Burns report and provide advice on options for future arrangements for post-primary education." The Costello group did not accept the Burns proposal on Collegiates.

Schools: Split-site Funding

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Education to detail his Department's policy on split-site funding for schools.

(AQW 18375/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Common Funding Scheme for the Local Management of Schools, sets out the details of the Department's policy on split-site funding in section 4.22. Copies of this document are held at the library at Stormont.

Eligibility for funding as a Dual site school will be determined by the relevant funding authority using the three criteria set out in the above guidance - there must be two distinct campuses, class teaching and learning must take place on both sites and a minimum of 15% of the total pupil enrolment must be based on each of the sites. If these criteria are met, funding will be provided from the funding authority's centre budget.

Irish Language: Examinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils sat examinations for Irish at (i) GCSE; and (ii) A-Level in each of the last five years.

(AQW 18393/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The Answer is contained in the tables below.

	GCSE Entries				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Gaeilge	99	126	107	133	118
Irish	2383	2055	1731	1680	1669
Total	2482	2181	1838	1813	1787

Source: RM data solutions

	A Level Entries				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Irish	254	238	328	334	319

Source: RM data solutions

Languages other than English and Irish: Examinations

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Education how many pupils sat examinations for languages, other than English and Irish, at (i) GCSE; and (ii) A-Level in each of the last five years, broken down by language studied.

(AQW 18395/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The answer is contained in the tables below:

	GCSE Entries				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Dutch	0	1	1	0	3
French	10588	9141	7716	7194	6603
German	1222	1271	1229	1265	1059
Italian	80	47	54	51	33
Modern Greek	0	0	2	0	0
Portuguese	27	20	24	13	17
Spanish	3119	3319	3118	3197	3382
Arabic	4	1	10	9	3
Bengali	0	0	1	0	1
Chinese	37	44	64	20	26
Japanese	0	0	0	0	2
Polish	29	81	95	80	101
Russian	22	14	14	18	34
Turkish	0	0	1	0	0
Urdu	1	0	1	4	2
Persian	1	0	1	0	1
Total	15130	13939	12331	11851	11267

Source: RM data solutions

	A Level Entries				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Dutch	0	0	0	1	0
French	662	694	657	707	562
German	145	159	137	153	113
Italian	7	0	2	0	1
Portuguese	1	0	1	1	3
Spanish	458	415	407	443	461
Bengali	0	0	0	0	1
Chinese	16	30	37	26	30
Polish	0	3	4	12	21
Russian	4	4	9	2	6

	A Level Entries				
	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
Turkish	0	0	0	0	1
Urdu	1	0	0	0	0
Total	1294	1305	1254	1345	1199

Source: RM data solutions

Primary 1 Places: North Down

Mr Easton asked the Minister of Education how many Primary 1 places will be available at each school in the North Down area for the new term in September 2013.

(AQW 18475/11-15)

Mr O'Dowd: The number of P1 places available is defined by a primary school's admissions number. Across the North Down constituency there are 1,121 places available at the start of the 2012/13 primary admissions process in the following schools:

School Name	Admissions Number
Ballyvester Primary School	16
Hollywood Primary School	75
Crawfordsburn Primary School	32
Ballyholme Primary School	90
Donaghadee Primary School	60
Clandeboyne Primary School	78
Millisle Primary School	30
Bloomfield Primary School	58
Grange Park Primary School	57
Kilcooley Primary School	81
Rathmore Primary School	79
Towerview Primary School	46
Kilmaine Primary School	87
Ballymagee Primary School	58
St Patrick's Primary School	45
St Anne's Primary School, Donaghadee	11
St Comgall's Primary School, Bangor	41
St Malachy's Primary School, Bangor	60
Bangor Central Primary School	87
Glencraig Integrated Primary School	30
Total	1,121

Details of school admissions numbers are available in booklets published by Education and Library Boards on their websites. For schools in North Down these can be viewed at:

http://www.seelb.org.uk/schools/Procedures_12_13/PDFs/Primary/2012/ArdSN.Down.pdf

Department for Employment and Learning

Education Maintenance Allowance: Claimants

Mr B McCreagh asked the Minister for Employment and Learning to detail the number of individuals claiming Education Maintenance Allowance at schools and Further Education Colleges in each of the last two years.

(AQW 18277/11-15)

Dr Farry (The Minister for Employment and Learning): I can confirm that a total of 25,170 students received Education Maintenance Allowance in academic year 2011/2012 and 24,930 in academic year 2010/2011.

Department of the Environment

Planning: Environmental Impact Assessments

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what targets are in place in the Planning Service when determining the need for an environmental impact assessment on a planning application; and how long on average does this process take.

(AQW 18153/11-15)

Mr Attwood (The Minister of the Environment): The Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 govern the procedures and timescales of the EIA process.

Regulations 7 and 10 state that the Department shall make a determination of whether a particular development is EIA development within 4 weeks from the date of receipt of the application or such longer period as may be agreed in writing with the applicant.

It was established in the case of *British Telecommunications plc and Another v. Gloucester City Council* [2002] JPL 2007 that this 4 week statutory time period is directory and that a planning authority can put right a failure to make a determination within this statutory time period when it properly considers the matter.

Planning: Wind Farm Applications

Mr Frew asked the Minister of the Environment what procedures are in place to assist planning service staff in Millennium House, who are assessing wind farm applications, to keep track of all private single wind turbine applications which are assessed at local level but which may affect wind farm applications; and how these procedures work to assist planning service staff at local office level.

(AQW 18154/11-15)

Mr Attwood: There are many and varied material considerations that may be relevant in the determination of a wind farm planning application one of which is an assessment of the planning history of the site and the surrounding area.

As part of the planning application process, DOE Planning staff utilise the information available on the Planning Portal as the main tool in identifying relevant planning histories within a particular area. This would also be the case when assessing wind farm applications, whereby planning staff at Planning HQ can determine the location and status of applications for single wind turbines in the vicinity of the proposal by carrying out a spatial search on the Planning Portal of the area of interest.

Any relevant planning history would then be fully assessed in the determination of the planning application and would be an important material consideration.

Similarly, within the local area offices, planning staff would also use the Planning Portal to carry out spatial searches in order to identify the location and status of any wind farms or single turbines in the area when assessing single wind turbine proposals.

It is important to note that the planning history of a site and surrounding area is one of a number of factors to be considered in reaching a balanced decision in any wind farm or wind turbine planning application.

Department of Finance and Personnel

Employment: People from outside the UK

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how many (i) foreign EU nationals; and (ii) people from non-EU countries are employed in Northern Ireland, broken down by gender.

(AQW 18129/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): The closest approximation to the information requested comes from the July - September 2012 Labour Force Survey (LFS). The LFS estimates¹ are detailed in the table 1 below:

Table 1: Employment by Country of Birth for July – September 2012

	Male	Female	Total
United Kingdom	384,000	349,000	732,000
Republic of Ireland	8,000	10,000	18,000
Rest of EU	22,000	14,000	36,000
Total EU*	30,000	25,000	54,000
Non EU	11,000	8,000	19,000
Total*	424,000	381,000	805,000

* Data rounded to nearest 1,000 therefore totals may not sum

1 Since the LFS is a sample survey, these estimates are subject to sampling variation

Family Spending Survey: Response

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number and proportion of local residents in 2010, who responded to the Family Spending Survey.

(AQW 18170/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response given in AQW 18234/11-15.

Income Tax

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of income tax generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18171/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my responses to AQW 17701/11-15 and AQW 17994/11-15 respectively.

Capital Gains Tax

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of capital gains tax generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18173/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my responses to AQW 17995/11-15 and AQW 17871/11-15 respectively.

Stamp Duty

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of stamp duty generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18174/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my responses to AQW 17995/11-15 and AQW 17871/11-15 respectively.

Family Spending Survey: Response

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number and proportion of local residents in 2010, who responded to the Family Spending Survey.

(AQW 18234/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The report 'Family Spending' is published annually by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and is based on results from the Living Costs & Food Survey (LCF), formerly known as the Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS). In 2010, from a representative eligible sample of 250 households in Northern Ireland, 147 households (59%) responded to the LCF.

Income Tax

Ms Fearon asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of income tax generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18235/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 17701/11-15.

Corporation Tax

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of corporation tax generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18236/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 17994/11-15.

Capital Gains Tax

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of capital gains tax generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18237/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 17995/11-15.

Stamp Duty

Ms McGahan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of stamp duty generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18238/11-15)

Mr Wilson: I refer the Member to my response to AQW 17871/11-15.

National Insurance

Ms Boyle asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of National Insurance contributions generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18239/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, Northern Ireland (NI) National Insurance Contributions (NICs) are based on an analysis of a sample of National Insurance Recording System data – supplied by HMRC – which is aggregated to represent the population using Government Actuary's Department (GAD) estimates of total NIC (employee and employer) accruals for each year. NI's share of employer and employee contributions in this sample is applied to the UK NICs figure to estimate NICs in NI.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

VAT

Mr Lynch asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of VAT generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18240/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, NI's share of UK VAT revenues is estimated based on average weekly household expenditure data in the ONS 'Family Spending Survey' publication. The appropriate VAT rating is applied to each expenditure item to estimate average household VAT revenues in NI and the UK. These average VAT revenues per household are then scaled by the number of households to estimate total VAT revenues in NI and the UK. The NI/UK ratio of total VAT revenues is then applied to apportion UK VAT receipts (as given in the PSAT2 databank) to NI.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Fuel Duty

Mr Brady asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of Fuel Duty generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11.

(AQW 18241/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, UK fuel duty revenue is apportioned to Northern Ireland (NI) according to its share of UK fuel consumption. NI's share of fuel consumption is estimated using regional road traffic fuel consumption data published by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC). The estimated NI/UK ratio of fuel consumption is then applied to apportion UK fuel duties.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Tobacco Duty

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of Tobacco Duty generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11. (AQW 18242/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, UK tobacco duty revenue is apportioned to Northern Ireland (NI) based on regional household expenditure data in the ONS 'Family Spending Survey' publication. Average weekly household expenditure is scaled by the number of households to estimate total weekly expenditure on tobacco in NI and the UK. The NI/UK ratio of total weekly expenditure on tobacco is used to apportion UK tobacco duty revenue to NI.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the "Government Expenditure and Revenue in Scotland" (GERS) publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Alcohol Duty

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the calculation used by his officials to estimate the amount of Alcohol Duty generated locally, which was published in the Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11. (AQW 18243/11-15)

Mr Wilson: As stated in Annex B of the Northern Ireland Net Fiscal Balance Report 2009-10 and 2010-11, UK alcohol duty revenue is apportioned to Northern Ireland (NI) based on regional household expenditure data in the ONS 'Family Spending Survey' publication. Average weekly household expenditure is scaled by the number of households to estimate total weekly expenditure on beer/cider, wines and spirits in NI and the UK. The NI/UK ratio of total weekly expenditure on each type of alcohol is used to apportion UK revenue to NI.

Alcohol consumed 'away from home' is also recorded at the UK level for beer/cider, wine and spirits in the ONS 'Family Spending Survey' publication. The distribution of alcohol consumed away from home is assumed to be the same in NI as in the UK. Purchases away from home are then added to purchases brought home to estimate total weekly expenditure on alcohol in NI and the UK. The estimated NI/UK ratio of alcohol consumption is used to apportion UK alcohol duty revenue to NI.

I must re-emphasise that this report has been developed applying the methodology originally designed to produce the GERS publication and is not intended to provide an accurate estimate of individual revenue items. The report provides an overall assessment of Northern Ireland's aggregate fiscal position, and as such, the report indicates that individual estimates should be interpreted with caution.

Small Business Rate Relief Scheme

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel, pursuant to AQW 17793/11-15, to detail the financial value of each level of small business rate relief, in each of the council areas shown. (AQW 18263/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The financial values of each level of small business rate relief, in each Council Area (Ballymena, Ballymoney and Moyle) are shown in the table below.

Council Area	Value of Small Business Rate Relief since April 2010		
	SBRR – 50%	SBRR – 25%	SBRR – 20%
Ballymena	£28,557	£237,044	£115,744
Ballymoney	£23,267	£92,829	£46,737
Moyle	£44,262	£91,312	£24,670

Shop Window Display Rate Relief

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of landlords or shop owners who have availed of Shop Window Display rate relief, broken down by council area; and the value of this relief. (AQW 18264/11-15)

Mr Wilson: To date no-one has availed of the Shop Window Display Rate Relief, although a couple of applications are under consideration.

Emigration

Mr McElduff asked (i) the number of people, in each District Council area in Counties Tyrone and Fermanagh, who have emigrated in search of employment, broken down by age; and (ii) the countries to which these people have emigrated.

(AQW 18276/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The table overleaf shows the estimates of out migration between mid-2010 and mid-2011 to (a) Great Britain and (b) to all other countries, for Cookstown, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Omagh and Strabane Local Government Districts, broken down by broad age bands. There is no information available on the reason for out migration. It is only possible to distinguish between out migration to Great Britain and to all other countries.

(a) Out Migration to Great Britain

Age	Cookstown	Dungannon	Fermanagh	Omagh	Strabane	Northern Ireland
0-15	11	23	54	27	23	1,189
16-39	119	213	446	259	188	8,580
40-64	14	16	54	34	26	1,124
65+	3	2	12	3	11	228

(b) Out Migration to all other countries

Age	Cookstown	Dungannon	Fermanagh	Omagh	Strabane	Northern Ireland
0-15	37	110	77	18	40	1,813
16-39	89	410	210	138	92	9,869
40-64	37	100	84	26	44	1,860
65+	8	8	16	4	2	282

Commuting

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of people who commute by ferry or air to work in England, Scotland or Wales; and the employment sectors in which these people work.

(AQW 18278/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information is available from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) on respondent's place of work. However, the LFS is a sample survey and it is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the number of people who live in Northern Ireland and work in England, Scotland and Wales by employment sector, because of the small numbers of persons in such groups in the LFS sample.

Capital Valuation List: Empty Domestic Properties

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail the number of empty domestic properties in each constituency that are currently on the Capital Valuation List.

(AQW 18310/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Information on the number of empty domestic properties in each constituency that are currently on the Capital Valuation List is not available as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only.

There is no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant. The table overleaf gives the number of domestic properties in each District Council Area that are currently (as at 31st December 2012) recorded as being vacant. Rate liability is assessed at 100% for vacant properties, subject to any exemptions.

Number of vacant and occupied domestic properties by District Council Area as at 31st December 2012

District Council	Number of domestic properties recorded as vacant	Number of domestic properties recorded as occupied	Total number of domestic properties
Antrim	625	20,394	21,019
Ards	1,223	33,438	34,661

District Council	Number of domestic properties recorded as vacant	Number of domestic properties recorded as occupied	Total number of domestic properties
Armagh	1,118	22,175	23,293
Ballymena	811	25,585	26,396
Ballymoney	481	11,655	12,136
Banbridge	890	18,773	19,663
Belfast	6,417	126,818	133,235
Carrickfergus	483	16,889	17,372
Castlereagh	770	29,133	29,903
Coleraine	1,551	27,117	28,668
Cookstown	850	13,111	13,961
Craigavon	1,514	37,949	39,463
Derry	1,246	42,307	43,553
Down	1,439	27,319	28,758
Dungannon & S.Tyrone	1,676	20,432	22,108
Fermanagh	2,495	24,484	26,979
Larne	553	14,257	14,810
Limavady	701	12,376	13,077
Lisburn	1,693	47,363	49,056
Magherafelt	726	15,110	15,836
Moyle	528	7,822	8,350
Newry & Mourne	2,195	35,355	37,550
Newtownabbey	811	35,652	36,463
North Down	1,031	34,575	35,606
Omagh	1,744	18,907	20,651
Strabane	906	15,359	16,265
All District Councils	34,477	734,355	768,832

Welfare Reform

Mr Swann asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel how much he has set aside in his budget to mitigate the effects of Welfare Reform in each year of the next Comprehensive Spending Review period.

(AQW 18314/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The current Northern Ireland Executive budget period extends to 2014/15. No budgets have been set for the period thereafter however the latest HM Treasury and Office of Budgetary Responsibility (OBR) forecasts indicate that public expenditure will be significantly constrained in the next Spending Review period – falling in real terms. It is in this context that the Executive will have to construct a local budget that embraces the additional pressures of the Welfare Reform initiative.

The Executive has already had to address budgetary pressures associated with Welfare Reform.

In November 2012 the Executive agreed to set aside £13 million in 2013-14 and £15 million in 2014-15 to address the rates relief funding shortfall within Housing Benefit that will occur as a result of Welfare Reform.

Northern Ireland Civil Service: Pensions

Mr Newton asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on Northern Ireland Civil Service pensions.

(AQO 3127/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Northern Ireland Civil Service pensions are being reformed. There are two main strands to the reform programme.

Firstly, my Department is presently consulting on a preferred approach to increases in employee contributions for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) from April 2013. The proposed increases represent tranche two of a programme to increase employee contribution rates to public service pension schemes by an average 3.2 percentage points over three years by April 2015. This policy was agreed by the Executive on 22 September 2011.

Secondly, I announced on 26 November 2012 that I propose to introduce a Public Service Pensions Bill in the Assembly. The Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (Northern Ireland) will fall within the remit of the provisions for pension reform contained in this Bill and the scheme will move from a final salary model of pension saving to a career average model, with the normal pension age linked to State Pension Age from April 2015.

Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 2005: Land and Property Services

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether Land and Property Services has changed any of its practices following the implementation of the Insolvency (NI) Order 2005.
(AQO 3128/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The introduction of the Insolvency (NI) Order 2005 further decreased the categories of preferential debt. Crown preference was abolished by Article 4 of this Order which came into operation on 27th April 2006. Rates had already been removed from the list of preferential creditors by the Insolvency (NI) Order 1989 which came into force in October 1991.

However, the implementation of the Insolvency (NI) Order 2005 has not required Land & Property Services to change its practices. Insolvency claims continue to be submitted by LPS in relevant cases.

Rates: Private Tenancies

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what consideration has been given to ensuring that tenants who live in private rented properties know the exact amount of rates they should pay to their landlord.
(AQO 3129/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The amount of rates due is usually not the issue here as this will be detailed on a rate demand that will be sent to whoever is liable for payment. The issue is more about who is liable.

My Department is in the process of drafting a consultation paper on this very issue, for publication in the next few weeks. I have written to the Minister for Social Development about the matter and already my Department has corresponded with the Landlords Association. My intention is to make some sensible changes that will make it clearer exactly who are responsible for paying rates in private rented accommodation. This will require an amendment to primary legislation and therefore any change cannot occur until April 2014.

I should also point out in relation to the question posed that under DSD legislation rent and rates must be stated in a tenants rent book.

Civil Service: Pay and Grading Review

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel for an update on the implementation of the pay and grading review in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.
(AQO 3131/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Implementation of the pay-related elements of reform for non-industrial staff, agreed as part of the pay and grading review, is underway. These changes were incorporated into a two year pay settlement for 2012/13 and 2013/14 the first year of which was implemented in November 2012 with the second year planned for implementation in August 2013. A focussed grading exercise is planned for 2013. Work has also begun on the review of industrial pay and grading arrangements.

Construction: Project Bank Accounts

Mr Humphrey asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel what plans he has to introduce project bank accounts for public sector construction contracts.
(AQO 3132/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Project Bank Accounts will be introduced this month for all new construction contracts tendered by Central Procurement Directorate that have an estimated value of over £1million and a significant subcontracting element.

Special Advisers

Mr McGlone asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel whether all special advisers appointed since he brought in the new appointment processes have been appointed in accordance with those processes.
(AQO 3133/11-15)

Mr Wilson: Since the introduction of the new arrangements for appointing Special Advisors in September 2011 arrangements have been or are being made in respect of the appointment of 5 Special Advisors. 3 appointments have been made fully in accordance with the new arrangements and 2 appointments have not yet been completed.

Devolved Legislatures: Funding

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to outline the process of consultation undertaken on the "Treasury Statement of Funding: Funding the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly".
(AQO 3134/11-15)

Mr Wilson: The Statement of Funding Policy states:

In line with the principle of mutual respect, the terms of this Statement have been agreed between the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Secretaries of State for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, following consultation with the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Executive.

The latest Statement of Funding Policy (SFP) drafting process occurred between July and October 2010.

HMT officials circulated a draft SFP to the Devolved Administrations seeking their views on potential revisions in early summer. My officials wrote to each NI department to seek their views on the proposed changes and the comparability factors contained within the document. My officials then communicated our proposed revisions and amendments to HMT. This was an iterative process and a final draft document was then passed to the Secretaries of State for their agreement. The document was formally released at the announcement of the 2010 Spending Review Outcome on 20th October 2010.

Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Criminal Justice Inspection: Maghaberry Prison

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 15895-11/15, for his assessment of the latest Criminal Justice Inspectorate report into Maghaberry Prison, where partnership arrangements are described as not working effectively.
(AQW 18107/11-15)

Mr Poots (The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety): The inspection by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate into HMP Maghaberry took place in March 2012. Whilst the Inspectorate's report was not published until December 2012, feedback was provided to the South Eastern HSC Trust at the time of inspection. Following this the Trust introduced changes to improve in-possession medication protocols, committal processes and lines of reporting and accountability.

Since the inspection, the South Eastern HSC Trust has established a number of strategic and operational fora where it can engage with the NI Prison Service and other key stakeholders to ensure that issues relating to interface working or partnership arrangements for the delivery of prison healthcare services are discussed and actions agreed.

Locum Staff: South West Acute Hospital

Mr Flanagan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how much has been spent paying locum staff in the new hospital in Enniskillen in each month since it opened, broken down by clinical department.
(AQW 18124/11-15)

Mr Poots: The cost of paying locum staff at the South West Acute Hospital, Enniskillen since it opened on 21 June 2012, broken down by clinical department, is set out in the table below. At this time, data is only available up to 30 November 2012.

Speciality	July 2012 £	August 2012 £	Sept 2012 £	Oct 2012 £	Nov 2012 £	Total £
Theatres	£106,322	£66,426	£55,346	£68,482	£52,564	£349,140
Surgery	£33,184	£33,287	£45,202	£29,257	£38,862	£179,791
Emergency Care	£87,991	£64,730	£61,107	£48,994	£62,216	£325,037
Medicine	£11,527	£0	£0	£0	£0	£11,528
Geriatric	£4,531	£16,362	£39,319	£53,643	£31,904	£145,759
Paediatrics	£19,501	£63,532	£40,081	£49,512	£41,646	£214,273
Gynae	£13,088	£19,348	£20,785	£18,495	£40,079	£111,795
Overall Total	£276,145	£263,685	£261,841	£268,383	£267,270	£1,337,323

Norovirus

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (i) to detail the number of confirmed cases of Norovirus this winter; (ii) the estimated occurrences, including those which have gone unreported; and (iii) what steps he has taken to combat the spread of Norovirus.

(AQW 18127/11-15)

Mr Poots:

- (i) Information provided by the Public Health Agency (PHA) indicates that in December 2012 there were a total of 55 laboratory-confirmed cases of Norovirus in Northern Ireland.
- (ii) There is no official estimate of occurrences of Norovirus cases as it is very difficult to estimate the number of unreported cases. However the PHA have indicated that the Health Protection Agency (HPA) have used Infectious Intestinal Disease (IID) data to estimate that the number of laboratory confirmed cases represents a small fraction of actual Norovirus activity and it is estimated that for each confirmed case, there are a further 288 unreported cases, as the vast majority of those affected do not seek healthcare services in response to their illness.

To reduce the spread of norovirus, also known as the winter vomiting bug, the Public Health Agency (PHA) publishes seasonal advice and reminders to the public on how to minimise the risk of infection. PHA issued press releases on 12 October, 8 November and 19 December 2012. The PHA has also produced an information leaflet explaining what norovirus is and how to prevent the spread of infection. The leaflet is available on the PHA website at <http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/norovirus>.

- (iii) [//www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/norovirus](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net/publications/norovirus).

The message to the public is that norovirus is a frequent hazard to health that causes unpleasant and brief illness for many people. The most commonly reported symptoms are nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, which can begin suddenly. In some people, these are also accompanied by a raised temperature, headache and sore limbs. The illness can last as little as 12 hours or up to three days. Treatment is to stay at home, rest, take plenty of fluids, and reduce contact with others, both in the home and at work. It is very important that people who have symptoms do not visit hospitals or their GP surgery. The key advice to the public, to reduce the risk of infection, is as follows.

- Always maintain good personal hygiene, in particular wash your hands after going to the toilet, and before preparing or eating food.
- If you are vomiting or have diarrhoea, don't visit friends or relatives in hospital or residential and nursing homes, and avoid visiting your GP's surgery; it is much better to phone in for advice first.
- Stay off school or work until at least 48 hours after symptoms have stopped.

Northern Health and Social Care Trust: Early Retirement

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many personnel across all grades within the Northern Health and Social Care Trust have been given early retirement packages in each of the last three years; and how many retirement packages are expected to be awarded in 2013.

(AQW 18128/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Northern Health and Social Care Trust has approved early retirement for 60 staff in the 2010/11 financial year; 7 staff in the 2011/12 year and 24 staff in the 2012/13 year. There is currently one staff member that has been given approval for early retirement in the 2013/14 financial year; and a further 30 applications from staff are also under consideration.

Hospitals: Stolen Equipment

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action his Department is taking to prevent valuable items of equipment from being stolen from hospitals.

(AQW 18150/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Department requires all HSC organisations to have procedures in place including Standing Orders, Standing Financial Instructions, Codes of Conduct and Accountability, documented financial policies and procedures and a system of internal control which promote an anti-fraud culture and reduce the likelihood of fraud occurring.

The Department also issues guidance on "Managing the risk of fraud" which sets out the principles of sound risk management, governance and control and how they are applied to fraud. This guidance clearly sets out the procedures and controls in place to prevent and detect fraud and includes details of controls for the prevention of theft of assets.

Health and Social Care Trusts: Stolen Equipment

Mr McCarthy asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the value of equipment stolen from hospitals in each of the last three years, broken down by Health and Social Care Trust.

(AQW 18151/11-15)

Mr Poots: The value of equipment stolen from hospitals in each of the last three years by Trust is set out in the following table.

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast HSC Trust*	£200	£3,460	£246
South Eastern HSC Trust	-	£8,599	-
Southern HSC Trust	-	-	-
Western HSC Trust	£349	-	£2,250
Northern HSC Trust	£50	£650	£4,933

* missing / lost / possibly stolen

Prescription Charges

Mr Girvan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he has any plans to reintroduce prescription charges; and whether there will be any exemptions to the charges.

(AQW 18152/11-15)

Mr Poots: In the context of the current economic climate, I have been considering a number of different options aimed at ensuring the efficient use of resources and looking at areas where money can be saved and used to protect front line services and improve access to certain specialist drugs. I can confirm that one of the options I have been giving consideration to is the possible introduction of prescription charges or some form of administrative or other fee relating to the receipt of prescriptions.

Any such proposals, including proposals to introduce exemption categories, would be subject to a full public consultation.

Antenatal Classes: Royal Victoria Hospital

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the operating hours of the antenatal clinics at the Royal Victoria Hospital; and the times when doctors are available at the clinics.

(AQW 18177/11-15)

Mr Poots: The antenatal clinics at the Royal Victoria Hospital are in operation from Monday to Friday of each week. Opening hours of the antenatal clinics are as follows:

- 8.00 – 9.00 am - Community Booking review appointments
- 8.30 – 12.30 am - Viability scans and booking appointments
- 8.30 – 12.30 am - Antenatal reviews - attended by Doctors
- 1.30 – 4.30 pm - Viability scans and booking appointments and antenatal reviews - attended by Doctors
- 4pm – 5pm - Community Booking review appointments
- Midwives are in attendance at all clinics.

Orthopaedic Surgery: Waiting List

Ms S Ramsey asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are on the waiting list for orthopaedic surgery in each Health and Social Care Trust; and what is the average waiting time in each Trust.

(AQW 18178/11-15)

Mr Poots: Inpatient surgery, in the Trauma and Orthopaedic (T&O) Surgery specialty, is provided at each of the HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland, with the exception of the Northern HSC Trust.

The number of people waiting for inpatient surgery in the T & O Surgery specialty in each Health and Social Care Trust, and the average waiting time in weeks, at 30th September 2012, the most recent quarter for which official statistics are available, is outlined in the table below.

HSC Trust	Total Waiting	Average Waiting Time (Weeks Waiting)
Belfast	5,970	18.8
South Eastern	29	4.8
Southern	614	17.1
Western	1,476	17.3
Northern Ireland	8,089	18.3

Source: DHSSPS Inpatient Waiting Times Dataset

Healthy Eating

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are his Department's initiatives to encourage healthy eating.

(AQW 18195/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department recognises the importance of good nutrition and our role in promoting and supporting healthy eating for all age groups. I launched the Obesity Prevention Framework A Fitter Future for All on 09 March 2012 and it contains numerous outcomes regarding the promotion of healthy food and nutrition.

As part of the implementation of A Fitter Future for All, the Public Health Agency (PHA) has undertaken a number of projects and initiatives to encourage healthy eating in collaboration with the community and voluntary sector, local government, health, education and food sectors. Examples include:

- Community Allotments programmes;
- Cook It! - a community based nutrition education programme;
- Nutrition Matters for the early years, a resource and training programme; and
- A range of programmes to encourage breastfeeding and appropriate weaning.

In addition, on 3 January 2013 the PHA launched a public information campaign which focuses on raising awareness of obesity and encouraging appropriate changes to eating and physical activity patterns to improve or maintain good health.

My Department also continues to work with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in relation to provision of clear information on food through labelling, calorie information on food menus, and working with the food industry on reformulation. Recent public consultation has resulted in the UK Government agreeing the hybrid food labelling approach which is a combination of guideline daily amounts (GDA), colour coding and high/medium/low text. This will ensure customers are fully informed about the nutritional content of pre-packaged foods. It is anticipated that details of the scheme and the new labelling will be agreed by Ministers across the UK in Spring 2013.

In relation to specific work with children and young people, my Department and the PHA have been working with the Department of Education and Education & Library Boards to support the implementation of nutritional standards for school meals, and other food in schools in all nursery, primary and post-primary schools. A draft Food in Schools Policy, developed by DE, in collaboration with DHSSPS, is expected to be finalised and launched in the Spring of 2013.

Healthy Eating: Children

Mr Ross asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what are his Department's initiatives to encourage healthy eating amongst children.

(AQW 18196/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department recognises the importance of good nutrition and our role in promoting and supporting healthy eating for all age groups. I launched the Obesity Prevention Framework A Fitter Future for All on 09 March 2012 and it contains numerous outcomes regarding the promotion of healthy food and nutrition.

As part of the implementation of A Fitter Future for All, the Public Health Agency (PHA) has undertaken a number of projects and initiatives to encourage healthy eating in collaboration with the community and voluntary sector, local government, health, education and food sectors. Examples include:

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Procurement: Surgical Gloves

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what unit price will be paid for each lot of surgical gloves under the current tender (NP569/11) awarded through the tri-nations procurement, which was led by the National Procurement, NHS National Services, Scotland.

(AQW 18200/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Tri-nations contract comprises four lots of different types of glove with a total of 32 brands of glove on offer. Prices range from 30p to £1.49 per pair but the actual price to be paid will depend on which gloves are actually purchased. The table below sets the range of costs for each of the four lots.

Glove type/lot	Unit Price Range £
General Surgical Gloves – Latex	£0.30 - £0.52
General Surgical Gloves – Latex Free	£0.747 - £1.49
Enhanced Grip – Latex	£0.45 - £0.54
Enhanced Grip – Latex Free	£0.80 - £1.25

Radiotherapy Unit: Altnagelvin Hospital

Mr Durkan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for an update on the radiotherapy unit at Altnagelvin Hospital.

(AQW 18206/11-15)

Mr Poots: Enabling works for this project commenced on site in June 2012. All enabling works are planned for completion by late 2013.

The design team commenced work with the Western Health and Social Care Trust (Trust) on Stage 1 Design of the new building in January 2012. This design stage was completed and signed off by the Trust in October 2012 and the planning application for the new unit was submitted to the Planning Service in mid December 2012. Stage 2 detailed design work has commenced and is expected to be completed by mid 2013.

The Stage 2 Outline Business Case (OBC 2) was approved in August 2012. Departmental and ROI officials are currently working together to agree the formal arrangements for the provision of radiotherapy services to ROI patients.

With regard to workforce planning, the Trust is working in close liaison with the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB)/Public Health Agency (PHA) to agree workforce requirements in the key staffing disciplines.

The completion and operational date for the Radiotherapy Unit at Altnagelvin remains mid 2016.

Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many people are currently diagnosed as having Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum in each Health and Social Care Trust area.

(AQW 18211/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information relating to the number of people diagnosed with Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum in Northern Ireland is not available.

Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum

Mr Boylan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety how many patients diagnosed with Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum are being treated for eye related disorders at the Regional Ophthalmology Department in the Mater Hospital, Belfast; and how many are being offered treatment with Lucentis Intraocular injections.

(AQW 18213/11-15)

Mr Poots: Information relating to the number of people diagnosed with Pseudoxanthoma Elasticum in Northern Ireland is not available.

Mefepristone

Mr Wells asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17928/11-15, in what circumstances can Mefepristone (RU 486) be used in private clinics.

(AQW 18225/11-15)

Mr Poots: In my response to AQW 17928/11-15 I set out the circumstances in which Mifepristone can be used. These also apply to private clinics.

Ordering a supply of Mifepristone for use in a private clinic, as with other Prescription Only Medicines, must be in accordance with the Human Medicines Regulations which apply to both NHS/HSC and private health care facilities.

Childcare

Mr Weir asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the number of childcare places available in each constituency.

(AQW 18270/11-15)

Mr Poots: Figures are not available in the format requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Figures for the number of available childcare places for children aged 12 or under broken down by Health and Social Care Trust area are available centrally and are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Available Childcare Places for Children Aged 12 or Under by Health and Social Care Trust Area at

Health and Social Care Trust	Available Childcare Places
Belfast	10,798
Northern	16,136
South Eastern	11,725
Southern	9,233
Western	8,022
Total	55,914

Source: HSCB Delegated Statutory Functions Corporate Parenting Returns

Note: Childcare includes Day Nurseries, Crèches, Playgroups, Out of School Clubs, Childminders, Summer Schemes and Two Year Old Programmes.

Respite Care

Mr Copeland asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what progress has been made in making the formal carer's assessment a mandatory step in the provision of respite care.

(AQW 18317/11-15)

Mr Poots: An assessment of an individual's needs, which may identify a need for respite, will also identify a carer, where one exists. The Carers and Direct Payments Act (Northern Ireland) 2002 imposed a duty on Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to inform carers of their right to an assessment of their own needs. This holistic assessment identifies what information, training or services are required to support the carer in their caring role.

As part of the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) a "Carers Support and Needs Assessment" component was produced. In December 2009, my Department identified this component as the regional "stand alone" carer's assessment tool of choice for all adult programmes of care. The aim was to bring a consistent structure to assessment and outcomes as Trusts discharge their statutory responsibility with regard to carers' assessments.

Primary Care Centres: Rural Communities

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to outline his Department's efforts to secure finance for the development of new primary care centres in rural communities; and when funding will be available for new capital builds in Fintona and Carrickmore.

(AQW 18331/11-15)

Mr Poots: My Department prioritises capital projects within existing budgetary constraints and reviews these priorities on an on-going basis, including planning for a range of health and care centres. My capital budget averages some £240m per annum and my Department ensures that this is used to full advantage as well as taking every opportunity to make a strong case for additional funding from the Executive as any additional money becomes available.

In light of current budgetary constraints, I am actively looking at alternative funding options to allow for the delivery of a modern health care model across the province. A programme of work is being developed which will explore the use of private finance in addition to public capital for new facilities, subject to value for money considerations.

The proposed "hub and spoke" model for primary care across the region is currently being consulted on as part of the "Vision to Action" consultation. At this point I have not identified funding for capital builds in either Fintona or Carrickmore.

Omagh Enhanced Local Hospital

Mr McElduff asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail the timeline for the building of the Enhanced Local Hospital in Omagh.

(AQW 18333/11-15)

Mr Poots: Enabling works to facilitate the building of Omagh Local Hospital (Phase 1) are well progressed. These include demolitions, road widening, sewage and drainage infrastructure and the construction of a new outer link road.

Work on construction of the hospital (including the health and care centre) will begin later this year (2013) and be completed in late 2015. Following a period of commissioning, the hospital will become operational in early 2016.

Fire and Rescue Service: Stolen Items

Mr McMullan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, pursuant to AQW 17844/11-15, whether the suppliers of the cars, from which parts were stolen, were compensated for those parts.

(AQW 18397/11-15)

Mr Poots: I have been informed by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) that the supplier of the cars, from which parts were stolen, has been compensated.

I have asked NIFRS to provide me with further details.

Type 1 Diabetes: Strategy

Mr Eastwood asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether he will introduce a strategy for Type 1 Diabetes.

(AQO 3142/11-15)

Mr Poots: In January 2012, I initiated a review of diabetes care in Northern Ireland. The aim of this project is to review the 2003 Diabetes UK/CREST Joint Taskforce Report in order to assess progress against the original report objectives and identify current gaps in diabetes service provision. It will assess current standards of care, new developments in managing diabetes, and assist in diabetes services being commissioned most effectively. The review will also include an assessment of diabetes care for children in relation to the aspirations of the CREST/Diabetes UK framework.

The review, which is being led by the Chief Medical Officer and covers both Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, has brought together clinicians and health professionals from a range of disciplines, as well as representatives from Diabetes UK. Progress is well underway and I anticipate that the Review Group will report its findings to me early this year. The outcome of the review will build on my Department's current investment in tackling this important health issue and strengthen the strategic direction for progressing diabetes care into the future.

Autism: Support

Mr Buchanan asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety what action he has taken to support people with autism and their families.

(AQO 3145/11-15)

Mr Poots: The Six Steps of Autism Care and Autism: A guide for Families were launched in late 2011. This Children's Care Pathway is currently being implemented by all HSC Trusts. I launched the Autism Adult Care Pathway in June 2012, which Trusts have also started to implement. Both pathways provide guidance on the identification and diagnosis of autism, ongoing assessment and access to interventions for people with an autism spectrum condition.

My department is leading on the development of a cross-departmental Autism Strategy, which is currently out for public consultation. As required by the Autism Act (NI) 2011, the Strategy will set out how the needs of people with autism and their families and carers will be addressed, throughout their lives.

Transforming Your Care

Mrs Hale asked the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety whether the anticipated reduction in residential homes through Transforming Your Care includes children's homes.

(AQO 3147/11-15)

Mr Poots: There is no explicit policy to reduce the number of children's homes. However, there is a strategy across Health and Social Care to reduce the number of children in residential care on the basis that early intervention and supporting families will lead to better outcomes for children in key areas of their lives. In keeping with the aims of the strategy, the number of children in residential care has reduced from 12.9% in 2006 to 8.7% in 2012. It is acknowledged that children are best cared for within their family of origin, or where that is not possible, within kinship settings or suitable alternative placements such as foster care, where appropriate.

Transforming Your Care recommended the completion of a review of children's residential care to reduce reliance on it. I can advise members that the review, undertaken by the Health and Social Care Board, has now concluded and a draft review

report has been produced. The draft report has been shared with all five Health and Social Care Trusts (HSCTs), which were fully engaged in the review process. The draft report sets the general direction of travel for the future provision of children's residential care services in Northern Ireland. The report is clear that there is a definitive and continuing need for residential care provision and that the residential care estate must be part of a whole systems approach to better meet the needs of young people both within the care system and on the edge of care. Work is ongoing between the HSCB and the HSCTs to determine and agree the future configuration of children's residential care to meet the needs of those children and young people for whom it is the preferred option.

Department of Justice

Crown Court: Cases Returned for Trial

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice how many criminal cases were returned to the Crown Court as of 31 October 2011, compared to 2008.

(AQW 18114/11-15)

Mr Ford (The Minister of Justice): The table below sets out the total number of criminal cases returned for trial in the Crown Court broken down by County Court Division in the period from 1 January - 31 October 2011 and compared to the same date in 2008.

County Court Division	1 January to 31 October 2008	1 January to 31 October 2011
Belfast	430	469
Londonderry	121	101
Armagh and South Down	101	119
Ards	122	168
Craigavon	110	161
Fermanagh and Tyrone	151	174
Antrim	149	98
Total	1,184	1,290

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

The table below sets out the number of outstanding Crown Court cases in each County Court Division as at 31 October 2011, compared to the same date in 2008.

County Court Division	31 October 2008	31 October 2011
Belfast	275	480
Londonderry	51	55
Armagh and South Down	40	82
Ards	55	110
Craigavon	68	112
Fermanagh and Tyrone	64	89
Antrim	82	77
Total	635	1,005

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Crown Court: Cases Returned for Trial

Mr A Maginness asked the Minister of Justice how many criminal cases were returned for trial in (i) Belfast; (ii) Derry; (iii) Armagh and South Down; (iv) Ards; (v) Craigavon; (vi) Fermanagh and Tyrone; and (vii) Antrim as of 31 October 2011, compared to 2008.

(AQW 18115/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the total number of criminal cases returned for trial in the Crown Court broken down by County Court Division in the period from 1 January - 31 October 2011 and compared to the same date in 2008.

County Court Division	1 January to 31 October 2008	1 January to 31 October 2011
Belfast	430	469
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(AQW 18116/11-15)

Mr Ford: The table below sets out the total number of criminal cases returned for trial in the Crown Court broken down by County Court Division in the period from 1 January - 31 October 2011 and compared to the same date in 2008.

County Court Division	1 January to 31 October 2008	1 January to 31 October 2011
Belfast	430	469
Londonderry	121	101
Armagh and South Down	101	119
Ards	122	168
Craigavon	110	161
Fermanagh and Tyrone	151	174
Antrim	149	98
Total	1,184	1,290

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Antrim	82	77
Total	635	1,005

Source: Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS)

Magistrates' Court: Public Cost Incurred in Cases 0717289 and 0717355

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister of Justice how much public money has been spent by (i) the Public Prosecution Service; and (ii) the Legal Services Commission in prosecuting the application in the Magistrate's Court to have the goods, in case reference numbers 0717289 and 0717355, condemned and forfeited, and in resisting the cost of funding the defence to the condemnation and forfeiture application.

(AQW 18126/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Public Prosecution Service have had no involvement in case reference numbers 0717289 and 0717355 and therefore have incurred no costs. The Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission has no record of legal aid being granted to defend proceedings in relation to case reference numbers 0717289 and 0717355.

Bangor Courthouse

Mr Dunne asked the Minister of Justice what plans his Department has for the future of the Bangor Courthouse building.

(AQW 18292/11-15)

Mr Ford: I refer the Member to my answer to AQW/17482/11-15 on 7 December 2012. There is no further update at this time.

Prisons: Scanning Pilots

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister of Justice for an update on the scanning pilots in Magilligan and Hydebank Wood prisons.
(AQO 3152/11-15)

Mr Ford: As I have reported previously, Northern Ireland Prison Service officials continue to take forward work in conjunction with the implementation of Recommendation 8 of the Prison Review Team's final report.

Central to this work has been two pilots of Millimetre Wave technology in NIPS establishments and the development of our own Justification Application for the use of Transmission X-ray scanners in Northern Ireland prisons.

The Millimetre Wave body scanning technology pilots currently underway in Magilligan Prison and Hydebank Wood Young Offender Centre will be completed by the end of January. Prior to the completion of these pilots, I plan to invite any interested members of the Justice Committee to view the technology in operation at Hydebank Wood.

Evaluation of the results will commence once the pilots have been completed, and will focus on the effectiveness and appropriateness of this technology, measured against existing search procedures.

The evaluation process should be swift. However, until such times as it has been completed it is not possible to provide an assessment of the suitability of this technology for use in the prison environment.

Flag Protests: Policing Costs

Mr McKay asked the Minister of Justice to outline the cost of the policing operation as a result of the protests over Belfast City Council's decision on the flying of flags at City Hall.

(AQO 3153/11-15)

Mr Ford: The police have informed me that the total cost for the period 3 December to 17 December has been calculated as £3.8m. While some of that cost involved redirecting officers from otherwise important work to deal with the disorder, a significant part of it was from the need for additional police resource. The figures from 17 December have yet to be verified. Not only is there a financial cost to the PSNI when dealing with incidents of this nature, there is also a human cost in terms of injuries to officers and the wider cost to the community.

In relation to the number of people charged with public order offences, the PSNI have confirmed that as of 15 January 115 individuals has been arrested and of those 85 have been charged.

Over the weekend of 5 – 6 January the Chief Constable requested Special Court Sittings to be established; as a result 18 people were remanded in custody. I believe that this sends a clear message to the perpetrators that those who choose to become involved in such situations can and will be made to face the consequences of their actions. Furthermore the police investigation into incidents of disorder remains ongoing and we can expect to see more arrests and charges over the coming weeks and months ahead.

I would also like to pay tribute to the police officers for the courage and bravery which they have displayed often in dangerous, difficult and challenging circumstances. There is now a challenge for us all to work together to find a solution to the underlying issues and ensure that the scenes of disorder which have taken place since 3 December are never repeated.

Magherafelt Courthouse

Mr I McCrea asked the Minister of Justice to outline the reasoning behind the decision to close Magherafelt Court House. (AQO 3159/11-15)

Mr Ford: My decision to close Magherafelt Courthouse was predicated on the need to deliver efficiencies within a more challenging economic environment and respond effectively to the Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland report on the Court Estate and the Justice Committee report on Victims and Witnesses which emphasised the importance of providing better services and facilities to victims and witnesses.

I listened carefully to the points made by consultees and I recognise the convenience of having local court facilities. However, it remains the case that Magherafelt is one of the smallest and least well equipped venues within the court estate.

The closure of Magherafelt, together with the Hearing Centres at Bangor, Larne and Limavady, and the transfer of that business to larger court centres will deliver some modest running cost savings, improve utilisation of the remaining court estate and provide a higher standard of accommodation and facilities to court users, including victims and witnesses.

Threat of Attack: Elected Representatives

Mr Cree asked the Minister of Justice for his assessment of the resources which the Police Service of Northern Ireland has directed towards protecting elected representatives under threat of attack. (AQO 3160/11-15)

Mr Ford: Regrettably we have witnessed intimidation, threats and violence directed at elected representatives, whether from those involved in terrorist activity or those involved in the recent violence and disorder.

As Minister of Justice naturally I am concerned about this fact and I am sure all members will join me in condemning, without reservation, such behaviour, which is an attack on democracy itself and an attempt to undermine the political process.

The level of police resources directed to address such matters are of course, a matter for the Chief Constable. I am committed to assisting in any way I can to ensure that all possible steps are taken to protect elected representatives. I know a range of steps have been taken by the police to enhance personal security in individual cases, ranging from both advice to other operational steps. It would not, however be appropriate to discuss specific arrangements.

Elected representatives can also apply to the Home Protection Scheme which is administered by the NIO and is the responsibility of the Secretary of State.

Vehicle Immobilisation

Mr D McIlveen asked the Minister of Justice for an update on vehicle immobilisation on private land. (AQO 3161/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department is currently conducting an impact assessment of the options for vehicle immobilisation on private land. This will entail further engagement with key stakeholders, including DHSSPS, Roads Service, PSNI and consumer organisations, to explore the options available for controlling parking on private land.

I will consider this information, together with the outcomes of research and consultation in deciding on the way ahead.

Flag Protests: Public Order Offence Charges

Ms McCorley asked the Minister of Justice to outline how many people have been charged with public order offences in relation to the decision taken by Belfast City Council on the flying of flags at City Hall. (AQO 3162/11-15)

Mr Ford: The police have informed me that the total cost for the period 3 December to 17 December has been calculated as £3.8m. While some of that cost involved redirecting officers from otherwise important work to deal with the disorder, a significant part of it was from the need for additional police resource. The figures from 17 December have yet to be verified. Not only is there a financial cost to the PSNI when dealing with incidents of this nature, there is also a human cost in terms of injuries to officers and the wider cost to the community.

In relation to the number of people charged with public order offences, the PSNI have confirmed that as of 15 January 115 individuals has been arrested and of those 85 have been charged.

Over the weekend of 5 – 6 January the Chief Constable requested Special Court Sitings to be established; as a result 18 people were remanded in custody. I believe that this sends a clear message to the perpetrators that those who choose to become involved in such situations can and will be made to face the consequences of their actions. Furthermore the police investigation into incidents of disorder remains ongoing and we can expect to see more arrests and charges over the coming weeks and months ahead.

I would also like to pay tribute to the police officers for the courage and bravery which they have displayed often in dangerous, difficult and challenging circumstances. There is now a challenge for us all to work together to find a solution to the underlying issues and ensure that the scenes of disorder which have taken place since 3 December are never repeated.

Police Service of Northern Ireland: Increased Funding

Mr Hussey asked the Minister of Justice to outline the discussions he has had with the Treasury over increased funding for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

(AQO 3163/11-15)

Mr Ford: The Department of Justice does not discuss funding of the PSNI with HM Treasury. As is the process in all other Northern Ireland departments, my Department discusses funding with DFP.

The Department of Justice funding allocation was agreed by the Executive for the years 2011-15. This included £45m of additional security funding from the Executive for the PSNI.

In addition, working with DFP, access to a further £199.5m was secured from the HM Treasury to meet PSNI security pressures.

Any additional requests for funding by the PSNI are addressed in the context of the ring-fenced funding of the Department of Justice in the first instance. In the event of unforeseen pressures arising which are not capable of being met through that route, I will discuss the issues with DFP.

Any future discussions with the HM Treasury about additional funding for policing in the next spending review period would be led by DFP on behalf of the Executive.

Department for Regional Development

Ballynahinch Bypass

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development for an update on the progress of the Ballynahinch By-Pass Project. **(AQW 18117/11-15)**

Mr Kennedy (The Minister for Regional Development): Work to progress development of this scheme is ongoing following confirmation of a preferred line for the Ballynahinch Bypass proposal. Planning and completion of surveys, which will include a detailed environmental survey that is necessary to facilitate the preparation of an Environmental Statement, is also proceeding in advance of completion of the Direction Order and Vesting Order statutory procedures.

Subsequent progression to construction remains subject to the bypass proposal clearing the statutory procedures, having a satisfactory economic appraisal and, given other competing priorities, is dependent on funding made available in future budget settlements.

NI Water: Screen Works

Mr Hazzard asked the Minister for Regional Development, pursuant to AQW 13020/11-15, for an update on fulfilling these requirements.

(AQW 18118/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water (NIW) that planning approval has been obtained for the proposed new screen works at Ballyhornan and negotiations continue for the purchase of a plot of land to house the new facilities and on the access permissions to the site across a private road.

Funding for the project has been approved and a contractor has been appointed to commence construction work when the negotiations mentioned above have been completed. The current target date to begin construction work remains mid-March 2013.

Water Bills: Estimated Readings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development what percentage of water bills issued over the last two years used estimated readings.

(AQW 18134/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that of the 296,000 water bills that issued during the last two calendar years around 11% were based on estimated readings.

Water Bills: Estimated Readings

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development how the estimated readings used for water bills are calculated.
(AQW 18135/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that an estimated bill is based on the average daily consumption, calculated from each meter reading since the customer occupied the property, multiplied by the number of days in the billing period.

Revenue: Asset Sales

Mr D Bradley asked the Minister for Regional Development to identify the four revenue generating assets that were sold; and what receipts each asset generated.
(AQW 18137/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My Department sold only one revenue generating asset in the 2011/12 financial year and none in the current financial year.

The Department completed the sale of a car park at Kent Street in Belfast in March 2012. The car park at Kent Street was sold to the Department for Social Development to facilitate a regeneration scheme in the area. The Department received £300,000 for the sale and will continue to receive revenue from the car park until the regeneration scheme is completed.

Alan Lennon Case

Mr Weir asked the Minister for Regional Development for an estimate of the total cost in legal fees arising from the Alan Lennon case.
(AQW 18140/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I refer to the answer I gave to AQW 17158/11-15 on 10 December 2012.

Metro Passengers

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Regional Development to detail the number of Metro passengers on the last Saturday before Christmas and the first Saturday after Christmas in 2012; and how this compares with the same days in 2011.
(AQW 18307/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: The attached table provides the information requested.

	Saturday	Saturday		Saturday	Saturday	
	22/12/2012	24/12/2011	% Inc/Dec	29/12/2012	31/12/2011	% Inc/Dec
	Journeys	Journeys	Journeys	Journeys	Journeys	Journeys
Total	64,035	40,538	58.0%	54,263	44,056	23.2%

Sewage Treatment Plant: Drumlough Road, Rathfriland

Mr Rogers asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline (i) the cause of the foul odour that appears to be sourced at the sewage treatment plant on Drumlough Road, Rathfriland; (ii) what measures have been taken to address the problem; and (iii) will these measures prevent a recurrence of the problem.
(AQW 18343/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: I have been advised by Northern Ireland Water that it is not aware of an odour problem at Rathfriland Wastewater Treatment Works or at the two pumping stations on Drumlough Road and no complaints have been received in relation to this issue. In response to your question, NIW undertook an inspection of the area surrounding the treatment works and the pumping stations, and no odour problem was evident. If any further instances of malodours are experienced in the area, NIW would be happy to investigate and should be contacted via the Waterline on 08457 440088.

Legal Advice: Leak

Mr Allister asked the Minister for Regional Development to outline whether any investigations have been conducted into the leaking of legal advice tendered to his Department, but circulated to the Executive, in relation to the outcome in case of Lennon v DRD; and for his assessment of whether the leaking of legal advice complies with the obligations (i) under the ministerial code; and (ii) of civil servants.
(AQW 18422/11-15)

Mr Kennedy: My response to AQW 17885/11-15 refers.

I am not aware of any investigations having been conducted and it would be inappropriate for me to comment on whether or not an Executive colleague has complied with the obligations under the Ministerial Code. Similarly, I cannot comment on the actions of civil servants in other departments.

Department for Social Development

Housing: Unoccupied Properties, Tiger's Bay

Mr F McCann asked the Minister for Social Development how many (i) privately owned houses; and (ii) houses owned by social housing providers in the Tiger's Bay area of Belfast are currently unoccupied.

(AQW 17922/11-15)

Mr McCausland (The Minister for Social Development): In relation to (i) Land and Property Services of the Department of Finance and Personnel has advised that the number of privately owned houses in the Tiger's Bay area of Belfast that are currently unoccupied is not available in the format requested as data is collated at District Council and Ward level only. There is also no requirement for ratepayers to inform Land & Property Services that their property is vacant. In relation to (ii), the Housing Executive currently has 18 voids in the Upper and Lower Duncairn Common Landlord Area of North Belfast which includes the Tiger's Bay area. Nine of these properties are due to be demolished and the remaining nine are awaiting relet. Only one Housing Association has properties in the Tiger's Bay area, none of which are unoccupied.

Housing Executive: Maintenance Costs

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost to the Housing Executive of maintenance of properties in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 18119/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The information is not available in the format requested because the Housing Executive can only provide the cost of Response Maintenance by District Office area. Therefore, the cost of Response Maintenance of Housing Executive properties in the Bangor District Office area in each of the last three years was as follows:-

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
	£1.646m	£1.306m	£1.409m

The cost of Planned Maintenance for Housing Executive properties in (i) Bangor* and (ii) Holywood in each of the last three financial years was as follows:-

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Bangor Town	£202,000	£1,607,000	Nil
Holywood	Nil	£77,000	£791,000

* refers to Bangor Town

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Grass Cutting: Cost

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the cost to the Housing Executive of grass cutting in (i) Bangor; and (ii) Holywood in each of the last three financial years.

(AQW 18120/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The cost to the Housing Executive of grass cutting in (i) Bangor* and (ii) Holywood in each of the last three financial years was as follows:-

	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Bangor Town	£47,123.83	£45,818.76	£44,383.76
Holywood	£6,040.67	£5,695.67	£5,276.10

* refers to Bangor Town

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Housing Executive: Bangor Office and Staff

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his future plans for the Housing Executive office and staff based in Bangor.

(AQW 18121/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive is currently in the process of a restructuring programme and the Newtownards and Bangor offices will form one management unit. Their aim is to retain both Newtownards and Bangor offices to sustain local customer services but to locate management and administrative resources in the Newtownards office to maximise efficiency.

While the management team will largely be based in Newtownards, managers will be available to meet tenants and elected representatives in Bangor as required. Furthermore, there will still be a management presence in the Bangor office, and the majority of staff delivering local services will continue to work locally from the Bangor office.

This programme has just been initiated, with the appointment of a Housing Manager who will be responsible for both offices. Further consideration is being given to the composition of the management team and the number of staff to be redeployed. Once the restructuring is complete the new arrangements will be communicated. In the interim, service to the public and elected representatives will continue as normal.

Housing Executive: Waiting List

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development how many people in (i) Holywood; and (ii) Bangor are waiting to be housed by the Housing Executive.

(AQW 18122/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The number of people on the waiting list for (i) Holywood and (ii) Bangor* at the 1 January 2013 was as follows:-

Holywood	Bangor Town
357	1,816

* refers to Bangor Town

Both the Housing Executive and Housing Associations draw allocations from this waiting list.

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

Pensioners' Accommodation: Bloomfield Estate, Bangor

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development for an update on the pensioners' bungalows proposals for Bloomfield Estate, Bangor.

(AQW 18123/11-15)

Mr McCausland: An economic appraisal for this proposal is currently being finalised for consideration by the Department of Finance & Personnel. Once agreed, this will allow the formal consultation exercise to commence.

Subject to a positive tenant vote, it is envisaged that work will commence in May 2013. This is a challenging timeframe and remains predicated on no major issues arising during the formal consultation period.

Social Security Office: Ballyclare

Mr Girvan asked the Minister for Social Development to outline his future plans for the Social Security office in Ballyclare; and why this office cannot be used as a signing on office.

(AQW 18130/11-15)

Mr McCausland: In addition to its regional network of 35 Jobs and Benefit Offices/Social Security Offices, the Social Security Agency also has three Community Benefit Offices located in Ballyclare, Crossmaglen and Londonderry. The Social Security Agency has recently completed a strategic review of the processing arrangements for social security benefits delivered through the Jobs and Benefits network and is currently implementing the recommendations through the Customer First project. The Community Benefit Offices currently do not provide a full range of social security benefit services and the Social Security Agency is in the process of reviewing these offices in the context of delivering a modernised welfare system to all claimants.

In the Ballyclare area, responsibility for 'signing' is carried out under a service level agreement by the Department for Employment and Learning on behalf of the Social Security Agency. Staff from the Department for Employment and Learning are not located in the Ballyclare Community Benefit Office and it is not therefore possible to provide 'signing only' services at this office.

Welfare Reform Bill: Protection of Social Fund

Mr Copeland asked the Minister for Social Development what protections he can put in place to allow the work of the Social Fund to continue, should the Welfare Reform Bill not become law.

(AQW 18162/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Welfare Reform Bill is the legislative vehicle for the repeal of the legal provisions which enable payment of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for general living expenses elements of Social Fund to be made under social security legislation. Other Social Fund services, such as Budgeting Loans and regulated provision, will not be impacted but will be reformed and incorporated within the Universal Credit benefit.

In the event that the Welfare Reform Bill does not become law, the existing legislative powers to deliver Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans will remain in place. However, there remain significant operational and financial issues to be resolved to facilitate any continued administration of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans. To this end, officials in my Department will be seeking discussion with the Northern Ireland Executive and Whitehall departments as to the consequences arising from the break in parity in relation to Social Fund and the implications arising from the Statement of Funding Policy. Similarly, officials will be seeking discussion with the Department of Work and Pensions as to the continued use in Northern Ireland of the Social Fund Computer System for the delivery of Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans.

Asbestos Survey: Tendering Process

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development, in relation to the Housing Executive's tendering process for the provision of asbestos surveying services, why only 10 percent of the points allocated are for quality and 90 percent are for pricing.

(AQW 18183/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that all surveys are carried out to a specified Health & Safety Standard and that only competent contractors are selected.

As part of the procurement process, all tenderers had to complete and submit a Pre Qualification Questionnaire Pack (PQQP) and achieve a pass in all sections to proceed to the next stage. The evaluation of the PQQP included (without limitation) the following: -

- (a) Completeness and Compliance check - this is a check to ensure that all required information requested in the PQQP has been submitted. Failure to provide the required information, complete a satisfactory response to any question, or supply documentation that is requested within the specified timescales, may result in the PQQP being disqualified.
- (b) Criteria for the rejection of Economic Operators - this is an evaluation that the tenderer must comply with Regulation 23 of the Regulations;
- (c) Information as to economic and financial standing - this is an analysis and evaluation of the financial information provided by the tenderer, to verify that the Housing Executive's financial, economic and insurance requirements are satisfied. A tenderer must be in a sound financial position to participate in a procurement of this size as set out in Regulation 24 of the Regulations; and
- (d) Information as to technical or professional ability – this is an evaluation of the information provided by the tenderer that it has the levels of technical and/or professional ability required by the Housing Executive in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 25 of the Regulations

By evaluating these documents, and in particular the technical or professional ability section on a pass/fail basis, the Housing Executive ensured only competent contractors could qualify for this Tender. In light of this, the Housing Executive deemed a quality score of 10% was sufficient for the assessment of this tender.

Asbestos Survey: Tendering Process

Mrs Dobson asked the Minister for Social Development why, between 16 November 2012 and 6 December 2012, the quality score of companies tendering to provide asbestos surveying services to the Housing Executive altered by, in some cases, over 50 percent.

(AQW 18184/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive has advised that it was not assured that the integrity of the original evaluation process for the quality submissions was as robust as it would have expected. Therefore they decided to discontinue the award at that stage and to reassess.

Each tender quality submission was reassessed in an open, consistent and transparent manner for evidence of the tenderers ability to meet the stated requirements and new scores awarded accordingly. The uplifts to the quality scoring were as a result of the new panel's evaluation.

In accordance with the procurement process each tenderer was advised of the result.

Benefits: Home Assessments

Lord Morrow asked the Minister for Social Development (i) whether Work Capability Assessments or Employment and Support Allowance assessments can be carried out in the applicant's home; (ii) under what circumstances a home assessment can be refused; (iii) who makes the decision to refuse a home visit; and (iv) whether this decision can be reviewed.

(AQW 18194/11-15)

Mr McCausland: I can confirm that:

- (i) Work Capability Assessments may be carried out in the claimant's home;
- (ii) Claimants requesting a home assessment are required to provide medical evidence to support their request. A request for a home assessment may be refused if medical evidence is not provided or the customer's medical condition does not support the request.
- (iii) The medical evidence is considered by an Atos Doctor Healthcare Professional who will decide whether or not a home assessment should be carried out.
- (iv) If it is decided that a home assessment is not appropriate and the claimant subsequently provides further medical evidence the decision can be reviewed.

Child Benefit: Impact of Changes

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development for his assessment of the impact of the changes to child benefit on local families.

(AQW 18204/11-15)

Mr McCausland: Child Benefit matters are dealt with by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs and consequently my Department does not have access to the data in order to provide an answer to the Members question.

Benefits: Medical Evidence

Mr Durkan asked the Minister for Social Development what action his Department has taken to encourage Employment and Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance claimants to provide medical evidence with their applications, in order to give a full picture of the claimant's case.

(AQW 18207/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Social Security Agency has in place a number of processes to ensure that supporting evidence is provided at the earliest opportunity when an individual is making an application for Employment and Support Allowance or Disability Living Allowance.

Employment and Support Allowance claimants are advised, either by an Employment and Support Allowance agent on the phone or in writing, of the importance of supplying all relevant medical evidence at a number of stages throughout the claim process: at the initial claim stage; when completing a limited capability for work questionnaire; when attending a medical examination; when contacted prior to a disallowance decision being made; and upon receipt of an appeal.

Disability Living Allowance claim forms, and the accompanying notes which help the claimant fill in the claim forms, contain specific information and advice regarding the importance of providing any relevant medical evidence. Claimants are encouraged to forward any existing reports about their illness and disability that might assist in determining the claim. A reminder to this effect is also included where the claimant signs the Disability Living Allowance claim form.

Benefits: Reductions

Mr Gardiner asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the number of benefit claimants who have had their benefit (i) reduced; and (ii) increased in each (a) council area; and (b) constituency, in the last six months.

(AQW 18254/11-15)

Mr McCausland: It is not possible to provide the information in the format requested. However, the analysis below has been based on claims that were live in June/July 2012 and were still active in December 2012.

A claimant can claim more than one benefit and therefore the figures below may include multiple separate claims for one claimant. Also some benefits are linked to each other such as Income Support and Carer's Allowance. The entitlement in one of these benefits could decrease but is offset by an increase in the other.

Of the 898,370 claims that remained active during the period set out above:

- (i) 22,750 benefit claims were reduced.
- (ii) 26,480 benefit claims were increased.
- (a) Table 1 below shows the number of benefit claims that were reduced or increased in each Local Government District.

Table 1

Local Government District	Number of claims that were reduced	Number of claims that were increased
Antrim	560	670
Ards	840	1,090
Armagh	650	710
Ballymena	670	810
Ballymoney	370	420
Banbridge	520	610
Belfast	4,380	5,090
Carrickfergus	390	500
Castlereagh	590	840
Coleraine	650	840
Cookstown	480	530
Craigavon	1,180	1,320
Derry	1,770	1,950
Down	890	1,070
Dungannon	800	810
Fermanagh	700	910
Larne	320	470
Limavady	470	520
Lisburn	1,350	1,510
Magherafelt	470	530
Moyle	200	250
Newry and Mourne	1,410	1,400
Newtownabbey	830	1,040
North Down	710	940
Omagh	720	850
Strabane	720	660
Unknown	140	160
Total	22,750	26,480

(b) Table 2 below shows the number of benefit claims that were increased in each Parliamentary Constituency.

Table 2

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of claims that were reduced	Number of claims that were increased
Belfast East	1,000	1,270
Belfast North	1,700	2,040
Belfast South	1,000	1,380
Belfast West	2,110	2,080
East Antrim	870	1,140
East Londonderry	1,220	1,450
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1,200	1,420
Foyle	1,680	1,850

Parliamentary Constituency	Number of claims that were reduced	Number of claims that were increased
Lagan Valley	930	1,190
Mid Ulster	1,240	1,370
Newry and Armagh	1,520	1,520
North Antrim	1,180	1,430
North Down	830	1,120
South Antrim	950	1,150
South Down	1,350	1,540
Strangford	910	1,210
Upper Bann	1,480	1,660
West Tyrone	1,440	1,510
Unknown	140	160
Total	22,750	26,480

The Information provided in this response is governed by the Principles and Protocols of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This is enforced by UK Statistics Authority.

People's Gallery, Derry

Mr P Ramsey asked the Minister for Social Development what support his Department can offer to the Bogside Artists for maintaining the People's Gallery in Derry.

(AQW 18260/11-15)

Mr McCausland: While my Department has funded the creation of public art where it can make a positive contribution to the regeneration of an area or assist with community development, the Department does not provide funding for the maintenance or protection of artworks. Therefore, my Department does not have a funding programme which could provide support for the maintenance of these murals. If financial assistance is required to maintain the murals, the relevant Department is the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

North Down Alternatives

Mr Easton asked the Minister for Social Development what can be done to improve the heating system at the North Down Alternative offices in the Kilcooley estate, Bangor.

(AQW 18322/11-15)

Mr McCausland: The Housing Executive advises that the offices of North Down Alternative are in a commercial property at 2 Kilcooley Square, Bangor. It is not the Housing Executive's policy to supply any form of heating to commercial premises. The Housing Executive is not aware of any form of heating having been in place when this group was granted a lease at a peppercorn rent. It is the commercial tenant's responsibility to install heating, should they wish to do so.

Welfare Reform Bill: Regulations

Mr Agnew asked the Minister for Social Development whether all regulations implemented as part of the Welfare Reform Bill will be subject to full equality impact assessment.

(AQW 18334/11-15)

Mr McCausland: My Department completed an equality impact assessment on the Welfare Reform Bill which was published in May 2012, and work to update this document is ongoing.

As regards regulations flowing from the Welfare Reform Bill and in line with statutory obligations, I can confirm that all the regulations will be subject to equality screening and a full equality impact assessment in their own right where appropriate.

Revised Written Answers

This section contains the revised written answers to questions tabled by Members.

The content of the responses is as received at the time from the relevant Minister or representative of the Assembly Commission, and it has not been subject to the official reporting (Hansard) process or changed.

Revised Written Answers

Department of Finance and Personnel

In this Bound Volume, page WA 182, please replace AQW 2077/11-15 with:

Parking Spaces: Civil Servants

Mr Beggs asked the Minister of Finance and Personnel to detail (i) the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants, broken down by each town and city; and (ii) when each allocation was last assessed to determine whether the space was essential.

(AQW 2077/11-15)

Mr Wilson (The Minister of Finance and Personnel): I replied on 28th November 2011 to AQW 2077/11-15 in which you asked at part (i) to detail the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for civil servants, broken down by each town and city; and (ii) when each allocation was last assessed to determine whether the space was essential.

In order to respond to this question my officials had to request part inputs from all departments. I have subsequently been advised by the Department of Rural Development (DARD) of errors in the input received from them.

In the original response issued to the AQ, the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for Civil Servants was as follows:-

Town/City	Number of Spaces	Total
Belfast	1,006	£997,583
Londonderry	8	£3,200
Lisburn	19	£5,180
Omagh	93	£22,912
Armagh	29	£3,999
Banbridge	30	£6,399
Total	1,185	£1,039,273

Having now received a revised part input from DARD I can confirm that the number and cost of car parking spaces provided for Civil Servants is as follows:-

Town/City	Number of Spaces	Total
Belfast	1,017	£1,000,541
Antrim	2	£840
Londonderry	8	£3,200
Lisburn	19	£5,180
Omagh	93	£22,912
Armagh	29	£3,999
Banbridge	30	£6,399
Total	1,198	£1,043,071

I apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused.

I have copied this letter to the Speaker and all MLAs. A copy has also been placed in the library.

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Journal of Proceedings

Minutes of Proceedings

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 3 December 2012

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Assembly Business

2.1 Motion - Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr George Robinson replace Mr Alastair Ross as a member of the Committee for Employment and Learning; and that Mr Ian McCrea replace Ms Paula Bradley as a member of the Committee on Standards and Privileges.

*Mr P Weir
Lord Morrow*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Motion: Committee Membership

Proposed:

That Mr Danny Kinahan replace Mr Robin Swann as a member of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development.

*Mr R Swann
Mrs S Overend*

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - British-Irish Council Summit Plenary meeting

The First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson, made a statement regarding the British-Irish Council Summit Plenary meeting, held in Cardiff on 26 November, following which he replied to questions.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

3.2 Further Consideration Stage: Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15)

The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3.3 Further Consideration Stage: Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved the Further Consideration Stage of the Charities Bill.

No amendments were tabled to the Bill.

The Charities Bill stood referred to the Speaker for consideration in accordance with section 10 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

3.4 Motion: Jobseeker's Allowance (Members of the Reserve Forces) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**Proposed:**

That the Jobseeker's Allowance (Members of the Reserve Forces) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.5 Motion: The Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**Proposed:**

That the Licensing (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3.6 Motion: The Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012**Proposed:**

That the Registration of Clubs (Irresponsible Drinks Promotions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be affirmed.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

4. Private Members' Business

4.1 Motion: Report on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings**Proposed:**

That this Assembly welcomes the report from the Group of Experts on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA); and calls on the Minister of Justice, along with Executive colleagues, to implement the recommendations in the GRETA report which relate to Northern Ireland.

Lord Morrow

Mr P Weir

Mr J Wells

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 2.16pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Speaker in the Chair.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the deputy First Minister, Mr Martin McGuinness. The junior Minister, Ms Jennifer McCann, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Social Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland.

6. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.30pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

3 December 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 28 November - 3 December 2012

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
Library Square, Belfast Public Realm Scheme (DSD)
BT1 Gateway Belfast Site Development Proposal (DSD)
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:
 - Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) (2011 Act) (Commencement No.5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
Sickness Absence in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2011/12 (DFP)
Registrar General Northern Ireland Annual Report 2011 (DFP)
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 4 December 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Statement - Early Years: Learning to Learn

The Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd, made a statement regarding Early Years: Learning to Learn, following which he replied to questions.

2.2 Statement - Promoting Innovation in Health and Social Care

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding Promoting Innovation in Health and Social Care, following which he replied to questions.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Report on Inquiry into Unadopted Roads in Northern Ireland

Proposed:

That this Assembly approves the Report of the Committee for Regional Development on its Inquiry into Unadopted Roads in Northern Ireland; and calls on the Minister for Regional Development, in conjunction with his Executive colleagues and relevant bodies, to implement the recommendations.

Chairperson, Committee for Regional Development

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.22pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Agriculture and Rural Development

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, Mrs Michelle O'Neill.

4.2 Culture, Arts and Leisure

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín.

4.3 Assembly Commission

Questions were put to, and answered by, Members of the Assembly Commission.

The Speaker took the Chair.

5. Committee Business (Cont'd)

5.1 Motion - Report on Inquiry into Unadopted Roads in Northern Ireland (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6. Private Members' Business

6.1 Motion - Narrow Water Bridge Project

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the significant social and economic benefits, particularly for tourism, that will flow from the proposed Narrow Water Bridge Project in South Down; notes that the project has obtained planning consent on both sides of the border; welcomes the support of the Irish Government for the project and the Special EU Programmes Body's decision to allocate very substantial funding for the Bridge; calls on the Executive to make explicit its support for the project; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make clear his commitment to the successful delivery of the Narrow Water Bridge Project and to take the lead, along with his counterparts in the Irish Government, in ensuring that any remaining finance required to complete the funding package is committed immediately.

*Mr S Rogers
Mrs K McKeivitt*

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** (Division).

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

7. Adjournment

Mr Thomas Buchanan spoke to his topic on the future of acute mental health services in Omagh.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.47pm.

**Mr William Hay
The Speaker**

4 December 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

4 December 2012

Division

Motion - Narrow Water Bridge Project

Proposed:

That this Assembly recognises the significant social and economic benefits, particularly for tourism, that will flow from the proposed Narrow Water Bridge Project in South Down; notes that the project has obtained planning consent on both sides of the border; welcomes the support of the Irish Government for the project and the Special EU Programmes Body's decision to allocate very substantial funding for the Bridge; calls on the Executive to make explicit its support for the project; and further calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to make clear his commitment to the successful delivery of the Narrow Water Bridge Project and to take the lead, along with his counterparts in the Irish Government, in ensuring that any remaining finance required to complete the funding package is committed immediately.

*Mr S Rogers
Mrs K McKeivitt*

The Question was put and the Assembly divided.

Ayes: 47

Noes: 38

AYES

Mr Agnew, Mr Attwood, Mr Boylan, Ms Boyle, Mr D Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Byrne, Mrs Cochrane, Mr Dallat, Mr Dickson, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Flanagan, Mr Ford, Mr Hazzard, Mrs D Kelly, Mr G Kelly, Mr Lunn, Mr Lynch, Mr Lyttle, Mr McAleer, Mr McCallister, Mr F McCann, Ms J McCann, Mr McCarthy, Mr McCartney, Ms McCorley, Mr B McCrea, Mr McDevitt, Dr McDonnell, Mr McElduff, Ms McGahan, Mr McGlone, Mr M McGuinness, Mr McKay, Mrs McKeivitt, Mr Mitchel McLaughlin, Mr McMullan, Mr A Maginness, Mr Maskey, Mr Molloy, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr Ó hOisín, Mr O'Dowd, Mrs O'Neill, Mr P Ramsey, Mr Rogers.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr D Bradley and Mr McDevitt.

NOES

Mr Allister, Mr Anderson, Mr Bell, Ms P Bradley, Ms Brown, Mr Buchanan, Mr Clarke, Mr Copeland, Mr Cree, Mr Douglas, Mr Dunne, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Mrs Foster, Mr Frew, Mr Girvan, Mr Givan, Mrs Hale, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Humphrey, Mr Hussey, Mr Irwin, Mr McCausland, Mr I McCrea, Mr D McIlveen, Miss M McIlveen, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Moutray, Mr Newton, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Rt Hon P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Swann, Mr Weir, Mr Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Mr McQuillan and Mr G Robinson.

The Motion was **carried**.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 4 December 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

 - The Child Support Maintenance (Changes to Basic Rate Calculation and Minimum Amount of Liability) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
 - The Child Support Maintenance Calculation Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

For Information Only:

 - The Waiting Restrictions (Ahoghill) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents

Potential Short-Term Changes to A-Levels Consultation Document (DE)

Potential Short-Term Changes to A-Levels Consultation Response Booklet (DE)
9. Departmental Publications

Northern Ireland Tourist Board Annual Report 2011/2012 (DETI)
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 4 December 2012

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12		
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12		
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	22.01.13					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12					

**2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 10 December 2012

As agreed by the Business Committee the Assembly met at 10.30am to debate a motion tabled by the First Minister and deputy First Minister, with the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Executive Committee Business

2.1 Motion - Recent Unrest

Proposed:

That this Assembly unequivocally condemns the rioting and the campaign of intimidation, harassment and violent attacks on elected representatives following the decision of Belfast City Council in relation to the flying of the Union Flag; expresses its sympathy to all those who have been attacked, injured or threatened with attack in recent days, including police officers, elected representatives and their staff; reaffirms the absolute and unconditional commitment of all its Members to respecting and upholding the rule of law and the pursuit of their political objectives by purely legal and political means; and insists that any further protests be peaceful, orderly and organised in accordance with the law.

Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council meeting in Health and Food Safety sectoral format

The Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Health and Food Safety sectoral format, held on 21 November 2012, following which he replied to questions.

2.3 Statement - Salmon Conversation

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, advised the House that she was not in a position to make her statement, and apologised that Members had not received a copy of the statement.

2.4 Motion - Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.5 Motion - Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Automatic Enrolment) (Amendment No.3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

2.6 Motion - Pension Protection Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the Pension Protection Fund (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister for Social Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

3. Committee Business

3.1 Motion - Review of the Reduction in the Number of Northern Ireland Departments

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes the Report of the Assembly and Executive Review Committee on its Review of the Number of Members of the Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly and of the reduction in the Number of Northern Ireland Departments: Part 2 - Reduction in the Number of Northern Ireland Departments.

Chairperson, Assembly and Executive Review Committee

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

The sitting was suspended at 1.25pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.30pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) in the Chair.

4. Question Time

4.1 Education

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Education, Mr John O'Dowd.

4.2 Employment and Learning

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry.

5. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 3.31pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

10 December 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 5 - 10 December 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

The Commissioner for Children and Young People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts for year ended 31 March 2012 (OFMDFM)

Waterways Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2011 (DFP)

The North/South Language Body Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 December 2009 (DCAL)

5. Assembly Reports

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S.R. 2012/426 The Occupational Pensions (Revaluation) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/431 The Rules of the Court of Judicature (Northern Ireland) (Amendment No. 3) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/437 The Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/438 The Child Support (Meaning of Child and New Calculation Rules) (Consequential and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/439 The Child Support (Management of Payments and Arrears) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/421 Local Government (Boundaries) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/423 (C.43) The Child Maintenance (2008 Act) (Commencement No.9) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/424 (C.44) The Welfare Reform (2012 Act) (Commencement No. 5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S.R. 2012/430 The Magistrates' Courts (Costs in Criminal Cases) (Amendment) Rules (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/432 The Loading Bays on Roads (Amendment No. 5) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/433 The Parking Places, Loading Bay and Waiting Restrictions (Randalstown) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/434 The Parking Places on Roads (Donaghmore) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Northern Health and Social Care Trust (DHSSPS)

8. Consultation Documents

Rathlin Island European Marine Site Management Scheme (DOE)

9. Departmental Publications

Review of the Efficiency Delivery Programme (NIAO)

Taking Boys Seriously: A Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Male School-Life Experiences in Northern Ireland (DE)

10. Agency Publications

11. Westminster Publications

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 11 December 2012

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Matter of the Day

2.1 The Attempted Murder of a Police Officer in East Belfast

Mr David Ford, made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the attempted murder of a police officer in East Belfast. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

3. Executive Committee Business

3.1 Statement - Intergovernmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters

The Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford, made a statement regarding the Intergovernmental Agreement on Co-operation on Criminal Justice Matters, following which he replied to questions.

3.2 Statement - Salmon Conservation

The Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure, Ms Carál Ní Chuilín, made a statement regarding Salmon Conservation, following which she replied to questions.

3.3 Statement - Planning Approval for Narrow Water Bridge

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, made a statement regarding Planning Approval for Narrow Water Bridge, following which he replied to questions.

3.4 Final Stage - Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15)

The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, moved that the Final Stage of the Inquiry into Historical Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill (NIA 7/11-15) Bill passed Final Stage without division.

3.5 Final Stage - Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15)

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, moved that the Final Stage of the Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15) do now pass.

Debate ensued.

The Charities Bill (NIA 11/11-15) Bill passed Final Stage without division.

The sitting was suspended at 1.05pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) in the Chair.

4. Speaker's Business

4.1 Royal Assent

The Principal Deputy Speaker advised Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 11 December 2012 to the Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012.

5. Question Time

5.1 Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster.

5.2 Environment

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood.

6. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

6.1 Motion - The draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the draft General Register Office (Fees) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister of Finance and Personnel

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

6.2 Legislative Consent Motion: Mental Health (Discrimination) (No 2) Bill

Proposed:

That this Assembly agrees that the provisions in the Mental Health (Discrimination) (No 2) Bill, as introduced in the House of Commons on 20 June 2012, dealing with company directors, should be considered by the United Kingdom Parliament.

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

7. Private Members' Business

7.1 Motion - Interest Rate Swap Agreements

Proposed:

That this Assembly notes with concern the fact that local banks may have mis-sold Interest Rate Swap Agreements to local small and medium sized businesses; further notes the campaign by Bully Bank.co.uk to highlight this issue and support businesses that have been directly affected; calls on banks to adequately compensate local businesses that have suffered; and calls on the Minister of Finance and Personnel to engage with the banks to ensure that customers who have been affected by this are treated fairly.

*Mr D McKay
Ms M Fearon
Mr M McLaughlin*

Debate ensued.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

8. Adjournment

Mr Daithí McKay spoke to his topic on the Suicide Rate in Moyle District.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.44pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

11 December 2012

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 11 December 2012

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

For Information Only:

7. Written Ministerial Statements
8. Consultation Documents
9. Departmental Publications
10. Agency Publications
11. Westminster Publications
12. Miscellaneous Publications

Census 2011 Key Statistics for Northern Ireland December 2012 (DFP)

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 11 December 2012

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12					
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12					
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	22.01.13					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12					

**2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.

Northern Ireland Assembly

Monday 14 January 2013

The Assembly met at noon, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Speaker's Business

2.1 Royal Assent

The Speaker advised Members that Royal Assent had been signified on 9 January 2013 to the Superannuation Act (Northern Ireland) 2013.

3. Matter of the Day

3.1 Escalation of Street Disorder and Challenge to the Democratic Process

The Rt Hon Peter Robinson, made a statement, under Standing Order 24, in relation to the Escalation of Street Disorder and Challenge to the Democratic Process. Other Members were also called to speak on the matter.

4. Executive Committee Business

4.1 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Meeting in Tourism sectoral format

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Tourism sectoral format, held on 28 November 2012, following which she replied to questions.

The Principal Deputy Speaker (Mr Molloy) took the Chair.

4.2 Statement - North South Ministerial Council Meeting in Trade and Business Development sectoral format

The Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Mrs Arlene Foster, made a statement regarding the North South Ministerial Council meeting in Trade and Business Development sectoral format, held on 28 November 2012, following which she replied to questions.

4.3 Statement - UK 2012 Autumn Statement - Northern Ireland Impact

The Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson, made a statement regarding the UK 2012 Autumn Statement - Northern Ireland Impact, following which he replied to questions.

4.4 First Stage - Planning Bill (NIA 17/11-15)

The Minister of the Environment, Mr Alex Attwood, introduced a Bill to amend the law relating to planning; and for connected purposes.

Bill passed First Stage and ordered to be printed.

4.5 Motion - The draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012

Proposed:

That the draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 be approved.

Minister of the Environment

Debate ensued.

The Speaker took the Chair.

The debate was suspended for Question Time.

5. Question Time

5.1 Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister

Questions were put to, and answered by, the First Minister, Rt Hon Peter Robinson. The junior Minister, Mr Jonathan Bell, also answered a number of questions.

5.2 Finance and Personnel

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Finance and Personnel, Mr Sammy Wilson.

6. Question for Urgent Oral Answer

6.1 No Oral Statement on Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Minister for Social Development, Mr Nelson McCausland, responded to a Question for Urgent Oral Answer, tabled by Mr Mark Durkan.

7. Executive Committee Business (Cont'd)

7.1 Motion - The draft Single Use Carrier Bags Charge Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** with cross-community support.

8. Committee Business

8.1 Motion - Single Farm Payments

Proposed:

That this Assembly acknowledges the importance of Single Farm Payments to the farming industry and to the wider rural economy; expresses concern about the issues arising from the inspection and payment system for the 2011 scheme; and calls on the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development to ensure that systems for the delivery of the scheme in the future are fit for purpose and that the inspection process is expedited effectively.

Chairperson, Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development

Debate ensued.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

9. Adjournment

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 5.41pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

14 January 2013

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 12 December 2012 - 14 January 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Act (Northern Ireland) 2012

Superannuation Act (Northern Ireland) 2013

2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly

3. Orders in Council

4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Report on the British Wool Marketing Board Agricultural Marketing Scheme 2011 – 12 (DARD)

Report on an announced inspection of Maghaberry Prison 19-23 March 2012 (DOJ)

Southern Health and Social Care Trust Annual Accounts for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DHSSPS)

Legislative Consent Motion for Provisions of the UK Energy Bill Relating to Electricity Market Reform (DETI)

National Museums Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 2011-12 (DCAL)

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period ended 31 March 2012 (OFMDFM)

Northern Ireland Screen Commission Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DCAL)

Northern Ireland Law Commission Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DOJ)

Insolvency Service Annual Report and Account for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DETI)

Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross Foundation Annual Report and Accounts 2011-2012 (DOJ)

Northern Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL)

North West Regional College Annual report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL)

South Eastern Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL)

Southern Regional College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL)

Belfast Metropolitan College Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31 July 2012 (DEL)

Social Security Agency Annual Report and Accounts 2011 – 12 (DSD)

Ilex Urban Regeneration Company Limited (Company Limited by Guarantee) Directors' Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2012 (OFMDFM)

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Charitable Trust Funds Trustees' Report Year Ended 31 March 2012 (DHSSPS)

The Accounts of the Charitable Trust Funds Held by the Northern Health and Social Care Trust for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DHSSPS)

DETI Registry of Credit Unions and Industrial and Provident Societies Annual Report 2011 - 12 (DETI)

5. Assembly Reports

Committee for Justice Report on the Criminal Justice Bill (NIA 86/11-15)

Report on Statement of Rate Levy and Collection 2009-10 and 2010-11 (NIA 88/11-15) (PAC)

6. Statutory Rules

(The department identified after each rule is for reference purposes only)

- S. R. 2012/441 The Strangford Lough (Sea Fishing Exclusion Zones) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/444 The Education (Levels of Progression for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DE)
- S.R. 2012/446 The Police Act 1997 (Criminal Records) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOJ)
- S.R. 2012/448 The Greystone Road, Limavady (Abandonment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/450 The Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Revocations) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DETI)
- S. R. 2012/451 The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) (Amendment No. 3) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S. R. 2012/452 The Common Agricultural Policy Single Payment and Support Schemes (Cross Compliance) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S.R. 2012/453 Pollution Prevention and Control (Industrial Emissions) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/455 Superannuation (Victims and Survivors Service Limited) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
- S. R. 2012/456 The Less Favoured Area Compensatory Allowances Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S. R. 2012/457 The Common Agricultural Policy Support Schemes (Review of Decisions) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DARD)
- S. R. 2012/458 The Foyle Area and Carlingford Area (Angling) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DARD)
- S. R. 2012/459 The Foyle Area (Control of Fishing) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 (DARD)
- S.R 2012/462 The Sex Discrimination Order 1976 (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2012 (OFMDFM)
- Draft S. R. 2013 The Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (Designated Organisations) Order (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DOJ)
- Draft S. R. 2013 The Welfare of Animals (Dog Breeding Establishments and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DARD)
- Draft S. R. 2013 Electricity (Priority Dispatch) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 (DETI)

For Information Only:

- S.R. 2012/417 (C.41) The Local Government (2005 Order) (Commencement No.3) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S.R. 2012/422 Local Government (Indemnities for Members and Officers) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DOE)
- S. R. 2012/440 (C.45) The Child Maintenance (2008 Act) (Commencement No. 10 and Transitional Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DSD)
- S. R. 2012/445 (C. 46) Air Passenger Duty (2012 Act) (Commencement) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DFP)
- S.R. 2012/447 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Ballymena) (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/460 The Waiting Restrictions (Dungannon) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)
- S.R. 2012/461 The Parking and Waiting Restrictions (Ballymena) (Amendment No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2012 (DRD)

7. Written Ministerial Statements

Community Pharmacy (DHSSPS)

Northern Health and Social Care Trust (DHSSPS)

Fundamental Review of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (DSD)

8. Consultation Documents

EU Dairy Package: EU Regulation No. 261/2012 (DARD)

Consultation on the Department for Regional Development draft Disability Action Plan (DAP) 1 April 2013 - 31 March 2016 and Five Year Review of DAPs (DRD)

Consultation on Proposed Changes to Rail Vehicle Accessibility Regulations & Rail Vehicle Accessibility (Applications for Exemption Orders) Regulations 2013 (DRD)

Early Years Strategy Team Learning to Learn: A Framework for Early Years Education and Learning (DE)

Proposed Consolidation and Updating of the Provision of Health Services to Persons not Ordinarily Resident Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, including Amendments to Specific Provisions and Extension to Primary Care Services (DHSSPS)

Future Railway Investment: A Consultation Paper (DRD)

Energy Consultation Further Legislative Measures to Transpose the EU Third Energy Package (DETI)

9. Departmental Publications

Special EU Programmes Body Annual Report 2011 (DFP)

Public Expenditure Terminology December 2012 (DFP)

10. Agency Publications

Northern Ireland Legal Services Commission Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DOJ)

Monitoring Report No. 22 A Profile of the Monitored Northern Ireland Workforce Summary of Monitoring Returns 2011 (Equality Commission (OFMDFM))

Fair Employment Monitoring Report No. 22 Summary Findings 2011 (Equality Commission (OFMDFM))

Social Security Agency Annual Report on Decision Making and Case Accuracy 1 January to 31 December 2011 (DSD)

The Northern Ireland Police Fund: Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2012 (DOJ)

Rehabilitation and Retraining Trust Annual Report 2011 - 2012 (DOJ)

The Local Government Staff Commission for Northern Ireland Annual Report and Accounts 1 April 2011 - 31 March 2012 (DOE)

Youth Justice Agency Executive Agency Framework Document December 2012 (DOJ)

11. Westminster Publications

Department for Work and Pensions: The Government's response to the consultation on DLA reform and Personal Independence Payment - completing the detailed design (DSD)

Department for Work and Pensions The Government's response to the consultation on the Personal Independence Payment assessment criteria and regulations (DSD)

Police (Complaints and Conduct) Act 2012 Chapter 22

Small Charitable Donations Act 2012 Chapter 23

Financial Services Act 2012 Chapter 21

Civil Aviation Act 2012 Chapter 19

12. Miscellaneous Publications

Northern Ireland Assembly

Tuesday 15 January 2013

The Assembly met at 10.30am, the Speaker in the Chair.

1. Personal Prayer or Meditation

Members observed two minutes' silence.

2. Private Members' Business

2.1 Motion - Commitment to Inclusivity, Mutual Respect, Peace and Democracy

Following receipt of a valid Petition of Concern to the Amendment (see Appendix 1), under Standing Order 28, Members were informed that the votes on the Amendment and the Motion would be taken as the first item of business on Monday 21 January.

Proposed:

That this Assembly reaffirms its commitment to the principles of inclusivity, mutual respect, peace and democracy; condemns all acts of violence and intimidation against police officers, elected representatives, other members of society, homes and property at all times; and calls on all political parties to support the spirit of the Belfast Agreement.

Mr M Nesbitt

Mr R Swann

2.2 Amendment

Leave out all after 'times;' and insert:

'and calls on all political parties to give full effect to their commitment to the consent principle which recognises Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.'

Mr G Campbell

Mr R Newton

Mr S Hamilton

Debate ensued.

2.3 Motion - Private Rented Sector Licensing Scheme

Proposed:

That this Assembly calls on the Minister for Social Development to consider the introduction of a licensing scheme for landlords operating in the private rented sector.

Ms P Bradley

Mr G Campbell

Debate ensued.

The sitting was suspended at 12.26pm.

The sitting resumed at 2.00pm, with the Deputy Speaker (Mr Dallat) in the Chair.

3. Question Time

3.1 Health, Social Services and Public Safety

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Mr Edwin Poots.

3.2 Justice

Questions were put to, and answered by, the Minister of Justice, Mr David Ford.

4. Private Members' Business (Cont'd)

4.1 Motion - Private Rented Sector Licensing Scheme (Cont'd)

Debate resumed on the motion.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr Beggs) took the Chair.

The Question being put, the Motion was **carried** without division.

5. Adjournment

Mr Dominic Bradley spoke to his topic on Car Parking in Newry.

Proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Speaker

The Assembly adjourned at 4.13pm.

Mr William Hay

The Speaker

15 January 2013

Appendix 1

Northern Ireland Assembly

The undersigned Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly presented a Petition of Concern, in accordance with Standing Order 28, on Monday 21 January in relation to the following amendment:

Commitment to Inclusivity, Mutual Respect, Peace and Democracy - Amendment

Leave out all after 'times;' and insert:

'and calls on all political parties to give full effect to their commitment to the consent principle which recognises Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom.'

- Mr Daithí McKay
- Mr Gerry Kelly
- Mr Cathal Ó Hoisín
- Ms Rosaleen McCorley
- Mr Francie Molloy
- Ms Bronwyn McGahan
- Ms Megan Fearon
- Mr Phil Flanagan
- Mr Chris Hazzard
- Mr John O'Dowd
- Mr Alex Maskey
- Ms Cairtriona Ruane
- Mr Raymond McCartney
- Ms Maeve McLaughlin
- Mr Barry McElduff
- Mr Mickey Brady
- Mr Seán Lynch
- Mr Cathal Boylan
- Ms Michaela Boyle
- Mr Mitchel McLaughlin
- Mr Fra McCann
- Mrs Michelle O'Neill
- Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
- Ms Sue Ramsey
- Mr Pat Sheehan
- Mr Oliver McMullan
- Mr Declan McAleer
- Ms Jennifer McCann
- Mr Martin McGuinness
- Dr Alasdair McDonnell
- Mrs Dolores Kelly
- Mr Conall McDevitt
- Mr Alex Attwood
- Mr Patsy McGlone
- Mrs Karen McKeivitt
- Mr Sean Rogers
- Mr Joe Byrne
- Mr John Dallat
- Mr Colum Eastwood
- Mr Mark H Durkan
- Mr Alban Maginness
- Mr Dominic Bradley

Northern Ireland Assembly

Papers Presented to the Assembly on 15 January 2013

1. Acts of the Northern Ireland Assembly
2. Bills of the Northern Ireland Assembly
Planning Bill (NIA 17/11-15) (as introduced) (DOE)
3. Orders in Council
4. Publications Laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly
5. Assembly Reports
6. Statutory Rules
For Information Only:
 - Draft S. I. 2013 The Public Bodies (The Office of Fair Trading Transfer of Consumer Advice Scheme Function and Modification of Enforcement Functions) Order 2013 (DETI)
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 15 January 2013

2011-2015 Mandate

Executive Bills

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Marine Bill NIA Bill 5/11-15	21.02.12	05.03.12	06.07.12	05.07.12				
Superannuation Bill NIA Bill 6/11-15	12.03.12	26.03.12	28.09.12	26.09.12	22.10.12	06.11.12	19.11.12	10.01.13
Inquiry into Historical Institutional Abuse Bill NIA Bill 7/11-15	12.06.12	25.06.12	26.10.12	24.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	
Business Improvement Districts Bill NIA Bill 9/11-15	25.06.12	17.09.12	13.12.12	13.12.12				
Criminal Justice Bill NIA Bill 10/11-15	25.06.12	03.07.12	14.12.12	13.12.12				
Charities Bill NIA Bill 11/11-15	02.07.12	11.09.12	23.10.12	23.10.12	20.11.12	03.12.12	11.12.12	
Welfare Reform Bill NIA Bill 13/11-15	01.10.12	09.10.12	22.01.13					
Education Bill NIA Bill 14/11-15	02.10.12	15.10.12	03.12.12	08.04.13				

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
/Air Passenger Duty (Setting of Rate) Bill NIA Bill 15/11-15	08.10.12	16.10.12	N/A	N/A	22.10.12	05.11.12	06.11.12	11.12.12
Water and Sewerage Services (Amendment) Bill NIA Bill 16/11-15	19.11.12	27.11.12	29.01.12					
Planning Bill NIA Bill 17/11-15	14.01.13							

**2011-2015 Mandate
Non-Executive Bills**

Title & Bill Number	First Stage	Second Stage	Comm. Stage to Conclude	Report Ordered to be Printed	CS	FCS	Final Stage	Royal Assent
Civil Service (Special Advisers) Bill NIA Bill 12/11-15	02.07.12	25.09.12	15.02.13					

/ Bill progressing by accelerated passage

** Please note that any bills that received Royal Assent in the previous session have been removed from the table.